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## **Abstract**

The research presented in this study considers policy implementation from an ideographic basis. The study focuses on a planned implementation initiative to introduce a learning outcomes paradigm within a university to implement policy related to Bologna and the implementation of the Irish National Framework of Qualifications. By adopting an ideographic approach to policy this study suggests that policy is not a static conception, policy is made and remade as it is encoded, interpreted and actioned by implementers. A processual/contextualist perspective to implementation is applied within this study drawn from the literature of organisational change. The research focuses on considering how policy is implemented in practice by those at two levels on the implementation staircase within the institution. The study is, therefore, a traditional implementation study focusing on the how of implementation; the study does not evaluate the outcomes of evaluation against the objectives of the reform.

An objective of this study was to complete an intrinsic case study within the researcher's university in the Republic of Ireland as a piece of independent institutional research. The findings of this study include the development of a case which adds to the empirical research into the institutional implementation of Bologna. A further finding of this study, relates to the application of processual/contextualist perspective to the study of policy implementation. This study suggests that this perspective provides a constructive means by which an ideographic policy analysis can be conducted.

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University of Durham

School of Education

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN HIGHER  
EDUCATION: AN IDEOGRAPHIC CASE  
STUDY

**Mairéad Nic Giolla Mhichíl**  
**2013**

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## Abbreviations

AC	Academic Council
ADTL	Associate Dean Teaching and Learning/Education
AFI	Academic Framework for Innovation
ANT	Actor Network Theory
ASC	Academic Strategy Committee
BFUG	Bologna Follow-Up Group
CHIU	Conference of Heads of Irish Universities
DCU	Dublin City University
DRHEA	Dublin Region Higher Education Alliance
EC	European Commission
ECTS	European Credit and Transfer System
EFQ	European Framework for Qualifications
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EU	European Union
EUA	European Universities Association
FIN	Framework Implementation Network
FTLC	Faculty Teaching and Learning/Education Committee
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HEI	Higher Education Institute
HETAC	Higher Education and Training Award Council
IOT	Institute of Technology
ISS	Information System and Services
IUA	Irish Universities Association
LIU	Learning Innovation Unit
LO	Learning Outcome
M&S	Marks and Standards
MGF	Multiple Governance Framework
MIS	Management Information System
MLO	Module Learning Outcome
NCEA	National Council for Educational Awards
NFQ	National Framework for Qualifications
NIHE	National Institute of Higher Education
NQAI	National Qualification Authority of Ireland
PLO	Programme Learning Outcome
PRTL	Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions
RGAM	Recurrent Grant Allocation Model
SIF	Strategic Innovation Fund
SRS	Student Record System
T&L	Teaching and Learning
VPLI	Vice-President for Learning Innovation
VPLI/R	Vice-President for Learning Innovation/Registrar

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### **Declaration & Statement of Copyright**

No part of the material offered in this thesis has previously been submitted by me for a degree in this or in any other University. The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

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---

August 2013

**Dedication**

**Do Spraoi tá tú liom fós**

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Background to the Study

Henkel (2007:90) argues that the “changing conceptions of knowledge” have led governments and their publics to expand, change and reform Higher Education. Theoretical knowledge is seen as a fundamental characteristic of innovation – the cornerstone of the so-called knowledge society:

And the university, research organizations and intellectual institutions, where theoretical knowledge is codified and enriched, become the axial structures of the emergent society.

(Bell, 1973:26)

Scientific knowledge has become an increasingly productive force in society in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, allowing for the continued development, manipulation and control of social constructs (Böhm and Stehr, 1986). Globalisation is a key factor driving the knowledge society and economy (Davenport and Prusak, 1998). Askling, Henkel and Kehm (2001:342) assert that the implicit knowledge and skills previously “inseparable from the human actor” have become increasingly explicit, codified and available to all through education. Bleiklie (2004) describes this interpretation of knowledge as an outcome as opposed to a procedure. Education is seen as a tool to develop human resources. Firstly, for the ultimate benefit of society and secondly, to meet the demands of the marketplace (Askling et al., 2001). Davenport and Prusak (1998:25) outline succinctly the prevailing paradigm:

People search for knowledge because they expect it to help them succeed...Knowledge is the most sought-after remedy to uncertainty... When we supply knowledge we expect to benefit too.

The instrumentality of knowledge and indeed Higher Education is described by Farnham (1999:8) as:

...relevant higher education is increasingly seen as a key factor in contributing to national economic growth, providing employable, flexible graduates and being a source of scientific and technological innovation to benefit the corporate sector.

The role of the state within Higher Education has also changed dramatically and concurrently to changes to the interpretation of knowledge. Traditionally, states were viewed as “a supervisor, steering from a distance and using broad terms of regulation” (1994:11) in the United Kingdom and Irish systems. The literature suggests that the state’s role in and influence on higher education is changing and increasing e.g. (de Wit, 2010 , Dill and Sporn, 1995 , Farnham, 1999 , Gornitzka, Kyvik and Stenstaker, 2005 , Hussey and Smith, 2010 , Neave and Van Vught, 1991) Shattock (2006:139) outlines one consequence of this as “...a sector more subordinated to government imperatives”. Bleiklie (2004) suggests that governments and their interaction with higher education are influenced by academic capitalism, thus introducing quasi-market mechanisms into the sector. However, he also argues that other factors such as the increased political importance of universities and the growth of funding of universities necessitated an increase in governments’ attention to higher education (ibid:31).

An analysis of the involvement of governments in higher education in OECD countries, demonstrates proactive states who are continuously implementing actions and reforms in higher education in response to a dynamic and changing environment (Gornitzka et al., 2005). Indeed, the Irish Government’s National Development Plan 2007-2013 (NDP 2007) aligns the capacity and quality of Ireland’s higher education system with the country’s fundamental social, economic and cultural welfare and clearly sets out its role in the future development of higher

education. Tying in with Salmi (2003:67) assertion that governments are tasked with ensuring that higher education embraces its responsibility in “guiding the system in response to global and local changes”. The increasing role of governments in Higher Education parallels with the emergence of a supra-national influence on European Higher Education systems (de Wit, 2010 , Robertson, 2008). The European Community (EC) has increased its role in Higher Education over the past fifty years. Neave (1998:vii) described this as a “the gradual emergence of a transnational policy for Higher Education”. Prior to the 1970s, a predominant view was held that education was not on the agenda of the EC (Neave, 1984). Corbett’s (2005) analysis suggests that a confluence of events and interactions supported the change in policy direction of the EC. Van de Wende and Huisman (2004) point to the Ministerial actions in 1976 of establishing an information network to provide a better understanding of national systems and structures, and the launch of the Action Programme in the Field of Education (de Wit and Verhoeven, 2001), as evidence of the increasing activity of the EC in education. Hussey and Smith (2010) view the introduction of the Erasmus programme in 1987 as one of the most important initiatives undertaken by the EC, to increase its role within higher education. Parallel activities in establishing the single market in the commission demonstrated the Community’s nascent policy agenda for Higher Education:

...intends to increase its support for cooperation programmes between further education establishments in the different Member States, with a view to promoting the mobility of students, facilitating the academic recognition of degrees and diplomas, and helping young people, in whose hands the future of the Community’s economy lies, to think in European terms.

(European Commission, 1985:26)



The European Union's (EU) direct involvement with education was established under the Maastricht Treaty in 1992:

The Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging co-operation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organization of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity.  
(European Community, 1992: Article 126)

Robertson (2008) asserts that although the activities of the EU were deemed supplementary to national activities and policies, she agrees with Corbett's (2005) analysis of the EU's move to develop a comprehensive policy agenda for Higher Education in Europe. Two European policy developments are identified by Keeling (2006) as playing a significant role in Higher Education in Europe, the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Agenda.

In 1999, the Bologna Process was established with twenty-nine states voluntarily participating (Gornitzka, 2006:27). Ireland entered the Bologna Process with national initiatives and policies reflecting many of the key elements and objectives of the process (Westerheijden et al 2010). The Bologna objectives developed into ten action lines, Table 1.

**Table 1 – 10 Ten Bologna Action Lines 2005**

1. Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees
2. Adoption of a system essentially based on two cycles
3. Establishment of a system of credits
4. Promotion of mobility
5. Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance
6. Promotion of the European dimension in Higher Education
7. Lifelong learning
8. Higher education institutions and students
9. Promoting the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area
10. Doctoral Studies and the synergy between the EHEA and the European Research Area (ERA)
<b>Source: Adapted from (BFUG, 2005:9)</b>

Difficulties of achieving co-ordinated policies within specific action lines came to light early on in Bologna (Lourtie, 2001). In 2007, at the London Ministerial Meeting it was accepted that a common currency to describe learning was essential:

There are two themes that link all action lines: a focus on learners, and a focus on learning outcomes. If the Bologna Process is to be successful in meeting the needs and expectations of learners, all countries need to use learning outcomes as a basis for their national qualifications frameworks, systems for credit transfer and accumulation, the diploma supplement, recognition of prior learning and quality assurance. This is a precondition for achieving many of the goals of the Bologna Process by 2010.

(BFUG, 2007: 3)

This common currency came in the form of learning outcomes. Some states within Bologna, however, had been moving to learning outcomes within their own educational systems e.g. United Kingdom, Ireland, Holland and Germany (Leegwater, 2006). This shift was also happening internationally in South Africa, New Zealand and Australia (NQAI, 2002). In 2003, the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) was launched it was described as a:

‘New style’ output-focused national frameworks employ ‘*workload, level, learning outcomes, competences and profile*’ plus credits – and are very different to traditional input-focused approaches used to place and explain qualifications.

(Adam, 2004:8)

The creation and deployment of qualification frameworks was recognised to have initiated institutional level policy implementation, as any qualification referencing an NFQ would also need to be described in terms of learning outcomes (Lassnigg, 2012). Adam (2013) asserts that at the institutional level learning outcomes will have curriculum implications impacting teaching, learning and assessment. He identifies three areas of focus for an institution, when implementing a learning outcomes approach Table 2.

**Table 2 – Implementing a Learning Outcomes Approach within an Institution**

Model and Area of Application	Features and Attributes
<b>Module:</b> (learning outcomes employed at the level of the unit or module as statements that identify what a successful learner will know, understand and / or be able to do)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concerned with the achievement of the learner</li> <li>• Differ from 'aims' that indicate the intentions of the teacher</li> <li>• Directly link to a teaching strategy for the effective delivery of the learning outcomes</li> <li>• Directly link to an assessment criteria and appropriate assessment criteria</li> <li>• Are developed in a context of a wide range of internal and external reference points and influences</li> </ul>
<b>Assessment and Grading Criteria:</b> (at the level of the module, learning outcomes can be used to express the criteria that establish the standard of achievement and the relative performance of individuals)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment criteria are the description of what the learner is expected to demonstrate to demonstrate that the learning outcome has been achieved</li> <li>• Grading criteria refer to the precise quality of the achievement of the outcome.</li> </ul>
<b>Unique individual qualification descriptors:</b> (learning outcomes used for describing and expressing individual subject-specific qualifications validated / accredited by a Higher Education Institution)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written individually or collectively by academics</li> <li>• Include subject specific statements</li> <li>• Can include general transferable / transversal skills</li> <li>• Created within the context of appropriate national/international 'external reference points' and qualification frameworks</li> </ul>
<b>Source: Adapted from (Adam, 2013:14)</b>	

Implementing learning outcomes, however, at the institutional level was identified as a significant barrier to the wider implementation of Bologna and the realisation of the European Area of Higher Education (Adam, 2013 , Bohlinger, 2012 , Reichert and Tauch, 2005). Further to this, implementing learning outcomes was seen to present higher education institutions with major challenges. This background situates the focus of this study, which is to study a policy implementation process within a university, where the implementation of a learning outcomes paradigm is an identified policy objective.

## 1.2 Aims and Research Questions of the Study

An overarching aim of this study is to investigate at the institutional level a process of policy implementation based on an ideographic view of policy. The study focuses on a planned implementation, conceived in part to implement Bologna and the alignment of programmes with the Irish NQF within a higher education institution. The study was conducted in the researcher's own employment context, i.e. a university in the Republic of Ireland. The study was supported by the university, who viewed it as independent institutional research. The study aims to address an empirical gap identified by Keeling (2004) of research of the Bologna Process, and in particular of research into institutional implementation and contexts. A further aim of this study is to develop an in-depth case focusing on the how of implementation which is in contrast with evaluation studies which focus on why (Kohoutek, 2013). The study's central and sub-research question are:

**How was the implementation of the Academic Framework of Innovation conducted within Dublin City University?**

- **Within an ideographic model of policy implementation, how is a planned change initiative implemented in practice in a university?**

The analysis of the policy implementation process was theoretically guided by an ideographic conception of policy (Trowler, 2008). Policy based in this conception views the policy process as dynamic, where policy is made and remade within local context as it travels up and down the implementation staircase (Reynolds and Saunders, 1987). Participants in this study can be considered in terms of two steps on the implementation staircase, institutional and departmental. The study drew on Dawson's (2003a) processual/contextualist perspective, which is rooted in the

literature of organisational change. Adopting this perspective was consistent with other policy implementation studies in Higher Education (Gornitzka et al., 2005). Applying this perspective on implementation, included considering the context, substance and politics associated with the conception, transition and operation of implementation (Dawson, 2003a).

### **1.3 Methodology**

The study adopted a qualitative, longitudinal research design, underpinned by a social constructionism epistemology. This study is closely aligned with institutional ethnography's focus on practice but there is a notable disjuncture between the theoretical framework adopted within this study and a tenet of institutional ethnography. The aim of this research was not to invalidate one participant account of his/her experience with that of another's so that we argue "...truthfully or faithfully" (Smith, 1987:122) for one particular account of implementation. This study argues that policy is made and remade by local implementers in particular socially constructed contexts, where diffuse accounts and outcomes of implementation are to be expected (Trowler, 2008). Findings presented in the case are constructed by the researcher mainly from the interview accounts of participants. Document analysis and desk research was also engaged in by the researcher, which is a consistent methodology in policy studies (Ritchie and Spencer, 2002). This study adopts Stake's (1995) conception of intrinsic case study research and the notion of the particularity of the case. The case included an embedded design (Yin, 2009), considering implementation from participants at two levels of the implementation staircase. The processual/contextualist perspective advocates the inclusion of competing histories and multiple constructions of participants which are inherent in an ideographic analysis. The researcher constructed the case by completing a thematic and narrative analysis (Langley, 1999). This strategy was complemented

and underpinned by a visual mapping strategy and the use of data-display matrices to aid with data reduction and presentation (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The study includes a historical construction by the researcher of the context of implementation guided in part by participant data and official university documentation. Considering historical issues is an important issue for policy implementation studies (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973) but is also important in terms of the underpinning epistemology of this study.

#### **1.4 Insider Research**

This study was completed by an employee of the university and as such can be described as insider research (Trowler, 2011). Mullings (1999) and Mercer (2007) question the dichotomy of the insider/outsider divide and suggest as does Trowler (2011) that this divide evolves along a continuum. They assert that a researcher does not maintain a static value of being an insider or outsider throughout the research process but rather moves on this continuum throughout that process. Insiders for example within an organisation can be treated as outsiders depending on the situation, on the topic of an interview and on their relationship with interviewees (Mercer, 2007). The researcher experienced this continuum in action and was treated as an insider, particularly when interviewing colleagues from the researcher's school or faculty where the researcher is (well) known and within the wider teaching and learning community within the university. This level of 'insiderness' of the researcher was diminished, however, in interview settings with some members of senior university management with whom the researcher would have had limited contact in her then professional capacity. Although, even within these interviews, interviewees were comfortable or prepared to treat the researcher as more of an insider in respect to specific and more generic topics and as an outsider on other topics particularly those related to personnel or financial issues.

(ibid). Drever (1991:31, In Mercer, 2007) describes the challenge for the researcher to engage with:

...people's willingness talk to you, and what people say to you, is influenced by who they think you are

The researcher's professional role encompassed at various times during the course of the study the following: a lecturer, an academic programme chairperson, a faculty teaching and learning convenor, a member of academic council and an Academic Framework for Innovation fellow. The researcher can usefully be considered as holding a complete membership role within the organisation (Adler and Adler, 1987 , Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). The meaning of this in practice is that the researcher is an existing participant in the organisational system that she researched and did not temporarily join the system to complete the research. Following the completion of this study, she remains a member of this organisation. This conceptualisation of the researcher's role within the study is noteworthy, as it is in contrast with the division of roles noted by Adler and Adler's (1987) associated with forms of participant observation.

The complete membership role supports and draws on the researcher's immersion within the organisation and those processes under study and rejects the position of gathering and analysing data from a detached and outsider perspective more associated with positivistic research (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). Coghlan and Brannick (2001) assert that insider researchers must manage challenges including access, pre-understanding, role duality and political interactions. In this study the researcher sought and was granted institutional approval and provided detailed descriptions of her research and methodologies, whilst conducting her research overtly. The researcher also provided an account of her research on request from participants and provided them with a facility to review the case study and the

capacity to correct factual errors. Pre-understanding is seen as a feature of insider research and can incorporate knowledge based on theoretical understandings of organisational dynamics combined with personal experiences (ibid:54). This iterative process to research design can be considered as a form of 'member checking' which contributes significantly to claims of credibility and reliability associated with qualitative research and in general, to its representational qualities (Patton, 2002). The researcher as a long-time employee of the institution had a range of insight into organisational dynamics with a decade experience as an employee of the institution. This experience was wider in breadth and depth at local levels i.e. school, faculty but was extended into other areas during the lifecycle of the research such as within administrative units and senior management roles within the university. Pre-understanding of formal decision making structures was quite useful to the researcher and the researcher was careful that her understanding was not restricted or bounded by what she previously knew or had experienced in the organisation (Gummesson, 1999:58-65).

Further difficulties, also arise for the insider researcher when participants take it for granted that the researcher is aware of particular organisational issues or events and they can sometimes withhold information based on the belief of pre-understanding by the researcher (Platt, 1981:79). To minimise these issues the researcher used interviews and contacts with participants to clarify and question them on issues and events of which she held no direct experience of. Issues of role duality and the augmentation of the researcher's professional role to conduct the research where not experienced. As highlighted by Trowler (2011), conducting insider research raises the issue of both institutional and personal anonymity. The researcher in the approval process did not assure institutional anonymity but committed to the closing of her thesis for a set period of time to allay any potential



reputational issues held by senior management in an effort to offset any limitation of access to institutional data. With respect to participant anonymity, the researcher adopted procedures during data collection, analysis and presentation to support the anonymity of participants. Finally, with respect to conducting insider research from the basis of complete membership role the notion of objectivity and the distancing of the researcher from the research and the participants is firmly rejected within this study (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007).

### **1.5 Main Findings & Implications of this Study**

A finding of this study is the case of policy implementation, a direct implication of which is for the institution under study to use as an independent piece of institutional research. This finding holds a wider implication, as it is a policy implementation analysis which fills an identified gap of empirical research into institutional implementation of Bologna linked reforms (Keeling, 2004). Tight's (2012) overview of higher educational research illustrates two further implications related to the study of implementation. This study's single case analysis is consistent with Tight's assertion that single case studies are both important to higher education researchers and to academics, and can be used to inform those working and researching in similar institutions and contexts. The processual/contextualist perspective applied in this study focuses on capturing the how of implementation. This study was not concerned with the construction of best practice models, linked to rational-purposive conceptions of implementation neither was it focused on examining what constitutes successful implementation. This follows Tight's conclusion that most published single case study research are limited by their focus on examples of successful implementation. This study as a traditional implementation study is focused on the how of implementation. It is not, therefore, constrained to establish either a positive or negative (or indeed a combination of

both) construction of implementation within its findings. The implication of this, therefore, for this research is to add to the body of knowledge of implementation research in higher education, beyond the constraints of evaluation studies. The study develops the notion of policy implementation being conceptualised as a process and supports the notion of policy been made and re-made by implementers within their situated contexts. The study findings emphasised the dynamics of the policy process with a focus on as Demers (2007:103) states “from the language of being to becoming” and what Pettigrew (1985c:287) viewed as studies of “...actors and systems in motion”. The study findings emphasise the agentic role in implementation and are consistent with studies that suggest that policy implementation is complex and socially mediated, as it travels up and down the implementation staircase (Reynolds and Saunders, 1987).

This study drew on Dawson’s (2003a) processual/contextualist perspective to underpin the analysis of implementation. Applying this perspective holds implications for researchers drawing on the organisational change literature to conduct policy implementation studies. This study found the application of this perspective to be a means by which ideographic policy implementation can be theoretically and methodologically framed. Moreover, the perspective demonstrated its capacity to engage with a planned initiative implementation. This finding develops Dawson’s (ibid) claim of the capacity of the approach to consider both emergent and planned conceptions of implementation. A further implication of this finding is the application of this perspective within a higher education context and the capacity of an insider researcher to conduct a processual study.

## **1.6 Limitations**

An important notion in implementation research is the start and end of implementation. The theoretical framework used for implementation facilitated a more flexible interpretation of the start of implementation as it included the consideration of the context prior to conception. The completion of the study of implementation was dictated in part of the constraints of time associated with the study as a doctoral thesis. An extended or further consideration of the operation of implementation within the university could be contemplated for further research into this case. An additional limitation of this study is the generalisation of the study's findings of implementation beyond the case itself, a limitation associated with many single-case studies (Yin, 2009). Nevertheless, this study argues that it holds empirical importance, particularly for institutions engaged in similar reforms and in similar contexts (Tight, 2012). Further limitations of this study are outlined within the relevant chapters, with an overarching critique of the study's limitations is completed in the final chapter.

## **1.7 Layout of the Thesis**

The thesis structure commences with the presentation of the study's theoretical framework. This framework is drawn from the literature of ideographic policy implementation and organisational change. The objective of this chapter is to set out the fundamental theoretical basis of the study and to argue for policy implementation from an ideographic and process perspective. Chapter three explores the research design and methodology adopted within the study. The chapter includes a consideration of specific analytical techniques used to consider processual data. Chapter four presents the case study of implementation, which commences with the researcher's construction of the context of implementation. The case then focuses on the study's central research question and sub-question.

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Findings are presented based on a thematic analysis. Furthermore, the case is considered as a finding in itself which is consistent with the objective of conducting intrinsic case research to study the particularity of one case (Stake, 1995). The construction of the case realised one of the objectives of this study, i.e. to complete an individual piece of institutional research. In chapter five, the findings of the case are contemplated in terms of the study's theoretical framework. Chapter six concludes with an overarching critique of the study, contemplating the limitations of this study as well as its implications and provides recommendations further and future research.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Introduction

The objective of this research is to develop a case of policy implementation based on ideographic conceptions of the policy process (Trowler, 2008). The analysis centres on a planned initiative within a university that was implemented in response to changes in the internal and the external policy environment. The use of organisational theory to underpin implementation studies is widespread (Gornitzka et al., 2005 , Kogan, 2005 , Kohoutek, 2013 , O'Toole, 2000 , Schofield, 2001) and organisation change and change management theories have provided the theoretical basis underpinning these studies (Barrett, 2004). Implementation research in higher education has also drawn from these theories where:

Implementation is seen as a case of organisational change in Higher Education institutions.

(Gornitzka et al., 2005:49)

However, much of the change management literature adopts a rational-purposive and top-down implementation approach to policy implementation and change, which views the policy process and change as staged, consistent and incremental (Trowler, 2008) e.g. (Burke and Litwin, 1992 , Carnall, 1990 , Kotter, 1996 , Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Roth and Smith, 1999). This study stands in contrast with this body of literature which advocates the management of implementation and change and the activities involved in this process and which ultimately offer step by step guides to implementers. The study advocates for ideographic conceptions of policy implementation which is closely aligned with the policy cycle.

A significant element of this argument is the inherent conceptualisation of policy as a process where:

...action is achieved by various dynamic effects, such as decision making, communication, bargaining, negotiation and even conflict. There also needs to be a concept of a continuum of action which links the policy itself to its effects on the ground.

(Schofield, 2001:254)

Policy implementation in this study is theoretically and rationally conceptualised as a case of organisational change. Furthermore, change and hence implementation is conceived as a process (Burke, 2008). The term process encompasses several meanings and is used in different ways by researchers. The definition of process within this study is based on an approach which is “event-driven” underpinned by a process theory (Van de Ven and Poole, 2005:1380). The outcome of this study is the development of a case study. This case explores how implementation of the Academic Framework of Innovation occurred within the university, in response to the research question posed:

**How was the implementation of the Academic Framework of Innovation conducted within Dublin City University?**

- **Within an ideographic model of policy implementation, how is a planned change initiative implemented in practice in a university?**

The focus of such research in Barnett and Carroll's (1995:219) view is "...the speed, the sequence of activities, the decision-making and communication systems, the resistance encountered..." A difficulty in conducting such research is outlined by Van de Ven and Poole (2005:1385):

Conducting process studies is very labor-intensive and typically involves the collection of large amounts of multifaceted data...processes are often quite complex, so developing process explanations and discerning patterns in process data is a difficult undertaking.

This difficulty is associated with the call for process researchers to conduct longitudinal research in an effort to provide elaborate and robust explanations of the process (Van de Ven, 1992) and to avoid single snap shot analysis of complex implementation processes (Dawson, 2003a). In spite of these difficulties, the aim of this research study is to provide a construction of an implementation process as event driven (Langley, 1999), tying in with Van de Ven's (ibid:170) definition as process research which "...takes an historical perspective, and focuses on the sequence of incidents, activities and stages that unfold..." and is related to the research of Pettigrew (1985b) and Dawson (1994) from a processual/contextualist perspective. Furthermore, this study differentiates itself from policy impact or evaluation studies – where these studies are concerned with "What happened?". Implementation studies, however are concerned with the "Why did it happen this way?" (Dolbeare, 1974) or more specifically as in the case of this study how did it happen? This study, therefore, is a classical implementation study. It focuses on the how of implementation from a process perspective, as opposed to a policy evaluation study centred on the analysis of policy outcomes with an associated objective of providing practical advice (Kohoutek, 2013). Hill's (2009) categorisation of policy analysis studies provides another useful categorisation for this study, as a study of the policy process which holds more rounded and holistic implications for

such research. This chapter sets out the theoretical considerations and framework adopted within this study drawing from the policy implementation and organisational change literature. The study's conceptual view of policy and policy implementation are also presented, along with the overarching conceptual view of ideographic policy implementation which informed and guided the selection of a coherent theoretical lens from organisational change theory. The processual/contextualist perspective to implementation is presented and discussed in terms of both change and policy implementation.

## **2.2 Policy as Process: Rational-Purposive V Ideographic Conceptions**

This study argues against using a purely rational-purposive conception of the policy process and advocates for the inclusion of ideographic views in the analysis of policy. The inclusion of an ideographic view captures the messy and often complex environments and situated contexts in which policy is encoded and implemented. Rationalist purposive policy accounts consider policy and implementation mainly from a linear and staged basis (Hill and Hupe, 2009). Dawson (2003b) states that the demand for such models by practitioners is based on their sequential framework, implying that implementation can be managed if all steps are followed. Such models promise through this abstraction that implementation can be managed within a policy environment, and therefore, implementation outcomes and behaviour are coherent and are rational. These models have been questioned and robustly critiqued both by academics and by practitioners (Abrahamson and Fairchild, 1999 , Burnes, 2000 , Collins, 1998 , Kanter, Stein and Jick, 1992). Such models provide sequential structured logic to the policy process and the associated acts of problem-solving, solution recognition and solution implementation (Howlett and Ramesh, 2003). They use a variety of terms to describe the main phases of policy as; agenda setting, formulation, implementation, feedback and evaluation (Hill and Hupe, 2009)



and invariably imply a top-down view of policy making and implementation. The rational-purposive model assumes that policy formulation and design is completed by those at the top within institutions or within government (in the national context). Furthermore, policy is presumed to be coherent, incremental and rational (Trowler, 2002). The major drawback of such conceptions is the unrealistic representation of the policy process as linear and rational (Howlett and Ramesh, 2003). John (1998:36) describes the weakness of such abstractions as:

There is too much change and messiness...for the simplification to capture enough reality.

Their approach, usually, focuses on; the implementation of the policy and the actions of the groups implementing it, the attainment of the objectives of the policy, the factors affecting the outcomes of the policy and the reformulation of policy based on experience (Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1983). They also integrate the concept of forward-mapping of a reform, i.e. that the reform issuer would set a clearly defined role for each step or actor in the implementation policy and align it with an associate outcome consistent with the original intent of the reform/policy (Elmore, 1979:603). Research based on this rationalistic approach is conceived in the literature of as top-down research. Trowler (1998) succinctly defines the underlying assumption of the top-down perspective, as policy or reforms that can be achieved, provided that directions from above are followed and that a number of pre-requisites are put in place by policy makers. Both Sabatier (2005) and Trowler (1998) conclude that perhaps the most important criticisms of the approach relates to the focus of the top-down perspective on the key-actors and the initial framing of the policy and the reform. This study, however, rejects purely rational and linear approaches to the analysis of policy and advocates for the inclusion of ideographic conceptions of policy and change (Trowler, 2008). The study is underpinned by the argument that policy formulation and implementation are intertwined and that policy

is made and remade during implementation. Policy is not viewed as a static concept within this study. This research adopts the position that the process of policy and implementation is shaped and remade by those involved at all levels of the implementation process, not only those at the top of government or within an institution. The nature of the policy that is put in place is contextualised within a more complex approach to policy implementation (Palumbo and Calista, 1990, Sabatier, 2005). Ideographic conceptions of policy are supported in the literature, particularly when policy is viewed as a process, as opposed to a once-off static event. Policy formulation and policy implementation are entwined from this basis. Policy formulation is more than a singular “step” or “stage” within a wider implementation process, as policy is formed and reformed as various implementers engage with it (Trowler, 2002). Stages’ models imply a hierarchy of action, which is in contrast with this non-linear conceptualisation of the policy process. This contrast is described by Barrett (2004:254-255):

Policy should be made ‘at the top’ and executed by ‘agents’ in compliance with policy objectives...

Or:

...alternative approaches which regarded implementation as part of a policy-making continuum in which policy evolved or was modified in the process of translating intentions into actions...

Educational policy research supports an approach to policy analysis where policy formulation and policy implementation are holistically examined and intertwined (Vidovich, 2001). This emphasis supports the notion of policy as a process “...something ongoing, interactional or unstable” where policy is “contested, interpreted and enacted in a variety of arenas” (Ball, 2008:7). Vidovich (2001) positions the emphasis of studies from a state-centred or top-down approach to a policy cycle approach as a shift of perspective from modernism to postmodernism or

post structuralism<sup>1</sup>. Ball (1995:255) describes this shift as a move from a “technical rationalist approach” to an “...‘intellectual intelligence’ stance that stresses contingency, disidentification and risk-taking. The overall assumptions of an ideographic approach to implementation and change used within study are set out in Table 3.

**Table 3 – Rational-Purposive v Ideographic**

<b>Rational-purposive</b>	<b>Ideographic</b>
Clear objectives in advance	Goals with space for interpretation ('low-res' initiatives )
Single clear problem to be addressed	Multiple issues wrapped up in a “single” development, different players, multiple goals
Milestones along the way	Project develop in the doing of them
Common outcomes expected everywhere	Diverse outcomes in different places
Resource based levers of change	Cultural awareness and domestication of change
Top-down direction	Diffused responsibilities
Redundancy and ‘failure’ to be avoided	An initiative may not immediately result in change, but is part of ‘working out’ process at local level. Developing a sense of ownership is important
Metaphor – ocean liner. Dominant captain, tightly coupled steering, environment less significant, groups determined by initial plan	Metaphor – yacht in heavy seas. Skilled crew, autonomous decision-making under central direction, environment very significant, responsiveness to conditions
<b>Source: Adapted from (Trowler, 2008:146-147)</b>	

### 2.3 Policy Location & Approaches to Implementation Research

The site of policy is an important consideration of this study as the study argues that policy formulation and implementation are not merely held by the upper echelons of the state or within an institution but rather policy is formulated and implemented and reformulated in a variety of locations (Gottweis, 2003). This study conforms to Ball’s (1994) notion of policy making and policy re-making. Policy is viewed not purely as an output by government or central authorities i.e. the legislation or blueprint of a specific reform as proposed by governments or institutions but policy is interpreted, remade and put into practice in and at a variety of different levels by implementers

<sup>1</sup> Vidovich draws on Lather’s LATHER, P. 1991. *Getting smart: feminist research and pedagogy with/in the postmodern*, London Routledge. use of postmodernism and post-structuralism where postmodernism relates to larger cultural shifts in a post-industrial/post-colonial era, whilst post-structuralism pertains to the operationalisation of those shifts based in academic theories. The term however is used interchangeably.

within institutions (Trowler, 2002). Policy being made and re-made by implementers throughout the policy process implies that policy cannot be purely viewed as rational and coherent, as it evolves and is implemented as it makes its way up and down the implementation staircase (ibid). Barthes (1976) notion of readerly and writerly texts is a useful conception for this study. It draws on the work of Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992) to distinguish between the level of participation of practitioners in policy development and indeed implementation. Participants in this study are viewed as active participants within the policy process, who co-author and interpret policy and implementation within the institution. Their involvement within the process is not limited or bounded by the structure or meaning presented by the author of the policy (ibid), in the case of this study the proposed AFI initiative. This study incorporates this notion of participants as active makers and re-makers of policy, which is consistent with agentic approaches to research of implementation. Such agentic approaches have been aligned with the bottom-up approach to policy implementation research (Sabatier, 1986). A bottom-up perspective focuses on the actors at the end of the implementation cycle and investigates their activities, strategies, goals and contacts (Gornitzka et al., 2005).

This information forms the basis in establishing the network of actors involved in the execution of a particular policy or reform at the local, national and regional levels (Hanf, Hjern and Porter, 1978). By doing this, those involved with a reform or policy can be identified, from the street-level, bureaucrats at the bottom of the network to the key actors in governmental, supra-national or private organisations (Elmore, 1979: 604). Street-level bureaucrats are the actors that implement the policy. In this capacity, and within each specific context, they define and shape the practical implementation of the policy or reform (Lipsky, 1971a, Weatherly and Lipsky, 1977). The study contends that the sense-making of policy by those implementing or interpreting it is influenced by the experience and context of those individuals

(Ball, 1994). The wider implementation literature accepts that policies evolve from historical activities, therefore, establishing a policy initiation point is not an easy task (Hill, 2009). The inclusion of a historical analysis, therefore, is considered an important feature of an implementation study. This study included a historical analysis of events under the context of change, although the initiative was formally approved within the university in 2007, the historical analysis ranged from 1984 onwards.

A bottom-up approach, usually, incorporates the concept of backward-mapping as an iterative process which starts at the final point in the implementation chain (Elmore, 1985). This process involves the examination of the current behaviour in terms of the policy at the end-point. The analysis then progresses to the next level up in the implementation chain (Gornitzka et al., 2005). This study integrates a retrospective or historical analysis within the institution based on participant data which is used to illuminate the past. Adopting either a purely top-down or bottom-up approach to implementation research has associated limitations. The top-down approach runs the risk of over-emphasising the importance of the centre, whilst the bottom-up can over-emphasise the power of lower-level or peripheral actors to challenge the centre in spite of the centre's ability to manipulate the institutional structures wherein individuals exist (Sabatier, 2005). The study adopts an agentic approach but does not exclude from its analysis the role of authorities or upper-levels in policy implementation which is one of the principal criticisms of bottom-up implementation research (Sabatier, 2007).

## 2.4 Implementation Research in Higher Education

The seminal study of policy implementation in Higher Education in Europe, conducted by Cerych and Sabatier (1986) adopted a top-down perspective underpinned by a rational-purposive approach to policy. The study bounded itself to examine change in terms of “deliberate and planned changed in Higher Education” (ibid: 4). Kogan (2005: 58) critiques this analysis, asserting that the un-deliberate and planned changed is traditionally the area of change most associated with Higher Education. The study did not exam curriculum reform, management and the decision-making structures in Higher Education (ibid). Cerych and Sabatier’s (1986) found that reforms with the most chance of succeeding are those that inspire engagement and commitment from advocates but are limited in their effects on the wider Higher Education system. Pre-requisites for positive implementation identified by Cerych and Sabatier (1986) in their study include; the clarity and stability of the policy or reform objective, the degree of change in objectives over time, the priority of the reform or policy in comparison to others, the commitment of stakeholders, the stability of the implementation environment and sufficiency of financial resourcing.

Later implementation research in higher education has demonstrated that the notion that higher education policy leads to linear processes of reform and change within institutions is insufficient to deal with the complexity of the implementation process (Gornitzka et al., 2005). This study considers the implementation of a planned change initiative which was linked to the implementation of the Bologna supra-national, national and institutional reform process. The study assumes that policy implementation conceptualised as change within an organisation cannot only be viewed purely as a linear outcome of any planned reform.

This argument is consistent with the findings of comparative research conducted into higher education reform in three European countries. The following finding outlines succinctly a principal assumption of this study:

Changes that have taken place were not the outcome of political reforms alone. They should be considered part of more comprehensive demographic, socio-structural and political-institutional processes of change.  
(Bleiklie, Høstaker and Vabø, 2000:307)

Kohoutek's (2013) review of implementation research in higher education indicates that researchers of higher education implementation have and are using a wide range of theoretical perspectives to consider aspects of implementation from theories of organisational change to instrumentation theory. Furthermore, this study assumes that policy making and policy implementation are integrated processes which are non-linear and that policy is more than just the product of central or top-down decisions (Gornitzka et al., 2005). To conceptualise this, the study draws on the notion of an implementation staircase as devised by Reynolds and Saunders (1987), focusing particularly on the institutional and departmental levels. This tool provides a conceptual framework to consider how forces at the various levels of implementation influence the process of policy implementation. Further to this, the implementation staircase prompts the consideration of the inherent tension of purely structuralist views and agentic views of policy (Trowler, 2002). The theoretical lens used to frame the case of organisational change draws on Giddens (1979) structuration theory and the study illustrates the interaction of agency and structure within implementation. Participants representing levels on the staircase within this study include national, institutional (university level stakeholders i.e. Directors of Units, Senior Management Representatives etc.) and departmental (Associate Deans for Teaching and Learning, Programme Chairpersons, AFI Fellows, Faculty Administrative Staff). Furthermore, the implementation staircase facilitates the

notion of uncovering implementation gaps as policy evolves. This gap is considered in the analysis by exploring the different constructions of participants of the implementation of AFI with the formal objective and implementation process (Scheirer and Griffith, 1990). Trowler and Knight's (2002) consideration of causal and contextual simplification, the obliteration of meaning and effect and contextual occlusion provide a structure for this analysis. Consideration is also given in this regard to the non-canonical practices implemented by participants and the sense-making attached to these practices (Brown and Duguid, 1991) as Trowler and Knight (2002:145) state "...innovations get meaning in practices". The following section considers organisational change frameworks and presents the processual/contextualist perspective and argues that this perspective provides an effective framework to engage with ideographic conceptions of the policy process.

## **2.5 Organisational Change Frameworks**

Models of change underpinned by a rationalist-purposive conceptualisation are predominant in the change literature and are related to managing change and the activities involved in an implementation process. They offer step by step guidance to practitioners of organisational change (Kappler, 2007) e.g. (Burke and Litwin, 1992 , Carnall, 1990 , Kotter, 1996 , Senge et al., 1999). Kotter (1996) provides an eight step model to aid implementer in managing implementation. He advises as follows: 1. to establish a sense of urgency, 2. form a guiding coalition, 3. create a vision, 4. communicate the vision, 5. empower others to act on the vision, 6. plan for and create short terms wins, 7. consolidate improvements, producing more change, 8. institutionalise new approaches. Many of these models focus on one element of the implementation process (Whelan- Berry, Gordon and Hinings, 2003). The literature, however, is extremely critical of the rational-purposive, top-down perspective, indeed, Doyle, Claydon and Buchanan's (2000:63) research found "change



continues to resist systematic preplanning, monitoring and assessment". They criticise the best-practice literature for its attempt to reduce issues to better planning with the seeming inherent acceptance "...the unanticipated can, in principle, be predicted" (ibid:73). Tension, resistance and failure to meet targets are regarded as undesirable features of implementation within these frameworks (ibid). Whelan-Berry, Gordon and Hinings (2003:188) critique these management models, suggesting that they have "...only anecdotal, as opposed to systematic, empirical support, and remain prescriptive". Collins (1998:84) argues for the analysis of implementation from a critical, reflective perspective, supporting complexity and contradiction as opposed to the implementation of "n-step" guides focused on consensus and stability.

Pettigrew Woodman and Cameron (2001) state that management models avoid complex questions of temporality and of situational issues, as do those researchers employing them. Although many of these models provide insight into various aspects of the implementation process, they predominantly maintain a one-size fits all approach, assuming that if a manager or implementer follows the prescriptive steps, implementation will be successfully achieved (Kappler, 2007). More complex models do exist and attempt to provide a holistic view of implementation by integrating the content of implementation with the process and context of implementation e.g. Burke Litwin Causal Model of Organization Performance and Change (Burke and Litwin, 1992). The difficulties with such models are primarily the limited evidence for the hypothetical casualties (ibid), and the limited consideration of the influence between variables (Kappler, 2007). Pettigrew et al. (2001:704) are critical of the current research, which call for the "what-to-do questions" to be added to the research. This criticism is similarly aligned with the blurring of the boundaries between policy implementation and evaluation research (Kohoutek, 2013). The aim of this study was not the development of a prescriptive to-do list to manage

implementation within the institution, but rather to examine how policy was implemented and as such this research is aligned with classic implementation studies. The following section presents the overarching processual/contextualist perspective used to investigate the implementation of AFI within the university.

## **2.6 Processual/Contextualist Perspective**

The processual/contextualist perspective implemented in this study derives from Pettigrew's (1985c) interpretation of contextualism and is based on the framework developed by Dawson (2003a). This perspective draws on Pepper's (1942) work on how different types of evidence are used to support or corroborate assertions of knowledge and Payne's (1975 , 1982) subsequent interpretations of Pepper's typology:

Contextualism is concerned with the event in its setting; the truth theory has to be qualitative confirmation, since the context will change and knowledge will also need to change, and the root metaphor is the historical event.  
(Pettigrew, 1985c:230)

Pepper (1942) viewed the concept of an event as an integral cornerstone of contextualism and contextualist research. Sminia (2009:104) describes this as the world being seen as an interaction and therefore change is a continuous possibility (Caldwell, 2006):

...the seed of change is there in every act which contributes towards the reproduction of any ordered form of social life.  
(Giddens, 1976:102)

Pettigrew (1990:269) criticised research as being "...ahistorical, aprocessual and acontextual in character". Calling for a holistic analysis, he encourages the

researcher to seek multiple explanations – linking in with Peterson's (1998) conceptualisation of process as a wave:

Look for continuity and change, patterns and idiosyncrasies, the actions of individuals and groups, the role of context and structuring and processes of structuring.

(Pettigrew, 1990:269)

Pettigrew (1990) outlines four key assumptions that underpin an analysis using a contextualist approach. Firstly, various levels of analysis should be examined e.g. individual, school, faculty, institutional, sectoral, national or supra-national. Such an examination provides for a comparison of the momentum, rate and trajectory of a process at different levels of analysis (Pettigrew, 1990:270). Within this study the implementation staircase provides a means by which the sense making of individuals functioning at various levels (Institutional/Departmental) within the university can contribute to an analysis of implementation (Reynolds and Saunders, 1987).

Secondly, contextualism attempts to demonstrate the importance and interconnectivity of temporality, i.e. how past or historical events influence the present and can colour the future (ibid). In the case of this study, discrete events are identified by participants as the Bologna Process 1999, the establishment of the National Qualifications Authority in Ireland in 2001. Less discrete events include the development of teaching and learning within the University and the evolution of the role of the Associate Dean for Teaching and Learning within the institution. Indeed, Peterson (1998:20) calls for the analysis of events in organisation within the "...larger and temporal context".

Avital's (2000) and Orlikowski and Baroudi's (1991) reviews demonstrated the predominance of atemporal analyses and single-snap-shot data collection methods of organisations, in spite of researchers admission of the importance of temporality in social inquiry, as Avital (2000:670) states:

The temporal dimension is not only inseparable from social action, it is also critical for one's comprehension and sensemaking of such phenomena.

In a similar vein, Ball (1997:266) criticises educational research asserting that "...most policy education research lacks any sense of time". The importance of temporality is outlined by George and Jones (2000:659) "...activity, makes up the experience and is grounded in what has come before and what is anticipated to come". This study is cognisant of Peterson (1998:19) when he asserts that social processes cannot be reduced to isolated units, but rather to events that encompass both continuous flow and discrete qualities. George and Jones (2000:677) stress the importance of temporality in an analysis:

Temporality is an essential feature of organizational behaviour and it makes little sense to ignore it, treat it implicitly, or treat it in an inadequate manner.

This study conceptualises an event as holding discrete and continuous flow qualities, whilst recognising the influence of the perspective and situated context of the observer (Peterson, 1998) and the role of context in the meaning given to an event (Pike, 1967). The analysis of events viewed as particles includes the investigation of antecedents and consequences of events (ibid). Dawson's (2003a:144) argues that it is not enough to "take a single snapshot of events" because:

Change does not occur in a neat linear fashion, but is messy, murky and complicated.

(ibid: 144)

The wave perspective of an event embodies the linking of events to form a wave. Actors may have difficulty in identifying a discrete focal event or events; therefore, analysis of events from a wave perspective will include multiple constructions (Peterson, 1998) or multiple realities from implementers (Dawson, 2003a). Particle events become less discrete and blend to form the event wave (Peterson, 1998) or as Demers (2007:108) describes the analysis of researchers of these waves "...they pay attention to the less-visible, day-to-day actions that help make these changes a reality". This research employs both of these considerations of events in its findings. Temporality plays a role in particle events that form the wave. Pettigrew's (1990) third assumption ties context with action. Pettigrew argues that action, context and structure are inextricably linked. Context and structure are seen as elements influencing and forming action and not just as a barrier to action. Furthermore, groups and actors utilise aspects of both in an attempt to achieve outcomes important to them (ibid:270). Pettigrew's combination of structure, action and context builds on Giddens collapsing of "structure as a system into structure as temporal processes of agential interaction or practice" (Caldwell, 2006:21) and as Nutt (2003:162) states:

...this need for simultaneous viewing occurs because there is structure in process and process in structure and strategy, organizational structuring, environmental attributions and other aspects of change.

This process view is categorised by Demers (2007) as focusing on the actors and the system or in Pettigrew's terminology the action and the structure, "...actors reproduce or transform structures" (Caldwell, 2006: 21). The critical nature of this agency of organisational members is recognised too by Giddens (1984) who contends that an organisation could not exist without it. This study by adopting an ideographic conception of policy implementation is therefore more concerned with the dynamics of changing, or as Demers (ibid:103) states "from the language of

being to becoming” and what Pettigrew (1985b:287) views as studies of “...actors and systems in motion”. The interplay of structuration theory and the political/dialectical theory of the processual/contextualist perspective particularly highlight the situated contexts that individuals make sense from e.g. the construction of one’s own reality and the issues of power and politics in that construction (Dawson, 2003a , 2003b , Pettigrew, 1985b , 1985c). The contextualist/processual perspective does not seek to establish one true authentic account of implementation (Dawson, 2003a). As Weick (1988:305-306) states, an individual:

...cannot know what he is facing until he faces it, and then looks back over the episode to sort out what happened.

Therefore, although a post-hoc interpretation of an event may occur and a constructed version of events emerges, the version created differs dependent on the social reality of the individual. Different collectives of individuals and groups can construct competing histories of the same event or as Lewin (1947) postulated individual behaviour is a function of the group field or group environment. Processual studies emphasise the actor at the micro-level and the organisation at the macro-level of analysis (Demers, 2007). The case study approach adopted combines an analysis based on the constructions of the actors within the institution, their experiences of implementation, and finally their interpretation of the process as it unfolds. Weick and Quinn (1999:382) state that this shift in emphasis from researching “change” to “changing”, involves the substitution of one thing for another, making one thing into something else or the attracting of one thing to change from what it was. This notion is consistent with the making and re-making of policy as previously outlined in this chapter. Tsoukas and Chia (2002:569) assert that the benefit of such an approach for theorists and practitioners is to ensure their careful consideration of the “...change-full character of organizational life”. Indeed,

Trowler, Saunders and Knight (2003:32) claim that it is more beneficial to contemplate changing than change due to the inherent dynamism that is always involved i.e. policy in practice. Finally, Pettigrew states that a contextualist approach does not search for one grand theory of change and as such is consistent with the notion that policy implementation can be diverse within an institution (Trowler, 2008). Multiple implementations are to be expected which are “explained more by loops than lines” (Pettigrew, 1990:270). Dawson (2003a:110-111) elaborates on this:

Unlike studies that seek to construct a single account of change, the co-existence of competing histories and views can be accommodated under processual research.

Buchanan and Boddy's (1992) critique recognises the approach's capacity to capture the complexity of implementation. The use of the implementation staircase within this study is seen as a means to engage with this criticism. They argue, however, that ultimately the approach does little to provide clarity and practical advice to those managing organisational change or implementation, whilst recognising that Pettigrew did not intend to provide practical advice (ibid). Palmer, Dunford and Akin (2006:217) agree with this critique but assert that the approach is not concerned with delivering a “...menu-driven way of achieving organizational change...” but more with providing a “...detailed analysis and understanding of change...” and hence implementation. Collins' (1998:71) critique of Pettigrew's contextualist perspective praises the linking of theory with practice and the methodological rigour but points to the imbalance of the research in providing “...practical advice and practitioner relevance”. Attempts have been made by Dawson to redress this criticism.

## **2.7 Dawson's Processual/Contextualist Perspective**

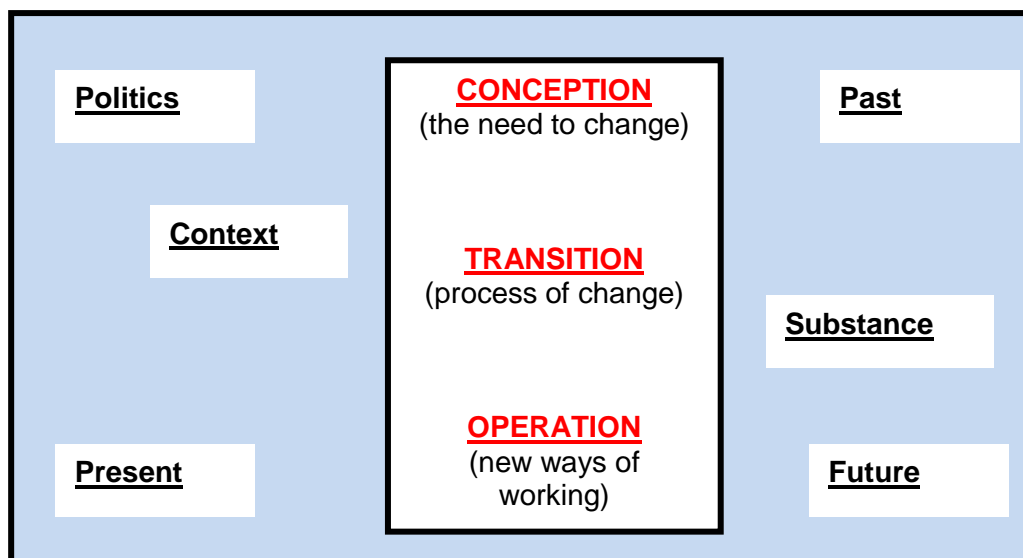
Dawson processual perspective was developed following twenty-years of research and field work, and was first published in 1994 (Dawson, 1994). The perspective has been drawn from and referenced, in a number of research studies, doctoral theses and widely within the organisational change academic literature since its publication. The perspective is identified alongside the original work of Pettigrew (1985b , 1985a), as adopting a perspective of change which is in contrast with rational, organisational development conceptualisations of change (By, 2005). A broad and diverse range of sectors have applied processual approaches to consider change – from studies of change within the American military to the analysis of change in offshore pharmaceutical industry. Dawson's perspective attempts to address some of the criticisms levelled at Pettigrew's initial work of not providing adequate advice or recommendations to those implementing change within organisations (Buchanan and Boddy, 1992).

The perspective includes a wider constituency of actors within the organisation to give a more holistic understanding of implementation processes (Dawson, 2003a) and includes street level bureaucrats implementing policy. Implementers play an important role in the processual/contextualist perspective as it is viewed as a "social action" (Bullock and Batten, 1985:387). The perspective achieves this by drawing on the context and process elements of Pettigrew's work and by introducing a critical conceptualisation of politics within these processes (Dawson, 2005). The approach is consistent with the rejection of a rational-purposive account of implementation and change (Dawson, 2003a). It supports an ideographic conceptualisation of implementation i.e. that diverse outcomes can be experienced and that multiple realities, accounts and experiences of implementation in context can exist associated with policy in practice.



The processual/contextualist perspective is capable of supporting a planned conception of change as a planned implementation (ibid), this remains consistent with the ideographic notion of implementation as described by Trowler (2008). The processual/contextualist perspective advocates a longitudinal design, with researchers usually immersing themselves within the context (Dawson, 2003a , Pettigrew, 1990). In this study, the researcher is viewed as holding a complete membership role as she is an existing participant in the organizational system being researched (Adler and Adler, 1987). Dawson's (2003a) perspective focuses on three elements within implementation: the politics, context and substance, Figure 1.

**Figure 1 – Dawson's Processual Perspective**



**Source: Adapted from (Dawson, 2003a:8)**

### **2.7.1 Politics of Change**

The politics of change refers to political activity both outside and within the institution. External politics are categorised by Dawson (2003a) as the role of lobbying groups, governmental influence and pressure, strategic alliances, and the influence of wider sectoral issues on local operations. Internal politics include, interactions between various groups within the organisation often linked to

hierarchical or other organisational structures, i.e. management, supervisory or trade unions for example (ibid). Political activities include consultation, negotiation, conflict and resistance which occur at different levels internal and externally to the organisation (ibid:9). Although these actions may imply public activities, where political and power struggles are at the centre of attention, often these activities take more subtle forms or as Schlesinger, Sather, Schlesinger and Kotter (1992:346) note, "In many cases, it occurs completely under the surface of public dialogue". Power and politics are viewed as central issues within organisations (Buchanan and Badham, 1999 , Dawson, 2003a , Frost and Egri, 1991 , Pettigrew, 1985b). The underlying political perspective of Pettigrew (1985b , 1985c) reasons that change and implementation bring about tension in the organisation, threatening the position of some actors, whilst providing opportunities to others within the context, thus supporting the notions of conflict and resistance. This conceptualisation of politics is consistent with Trowler's (2002) insights into policy implementation processes within higher education and the dynamics of and between implementers. From the rational-purposive perspective conflict and resistance are perceived as failure and should be avoided at all costs (Trowler, 2008 , Trowler and Knight, 2002). However, from an ideographic perspective politics is a common feature of everyday organisational life and is constituted by actors at all levels within the organisation (Dawson, 2003a).

This understanding or management of implementation, considered by Bennis (1984) as the management of meaning, involves active attempts to construct legitimate definitions and meanings of issues thus seeking approval, acceptance and ultimately adherence to change. Buchanan and Badham (1999:43) assert that a positive construction of power and politics is open to challenge. The mis-use and uninhibited use of power make "for ineffective management" (ibid:44) but the avoidance of politics is not an option. Power and politics are considered within this

study not only in terms of their management but also within their wider situated context (ibid:47) based on the constructions of participants.

### **2.7.2 Context of Change**

Kappler (2007:25) asserts that context can be considered as the antecedent conditions of implementation, "...the internal structure, cultural, social, relational, political context within which change occurs". Dawson's (2003a) definition of context includes both external and internal factors and is consistent with Pettigrew's (1985b) conceptualisation of context, including the organisation's environment. This dimension includes elements of temporality and the examination of contextual issues from the past, the present and projected contextual issues of the future in order to ascertain their influence on the current organisational environment (Dawson, 2003a: 10) and includes:

- Changing competitor's strategies;
- The level of international competition;
- Government policy and legislation;
- Changing social expectations;
- Technological innovations and
- Changing levels of business activity

Internal factors identified by Dawson (ibid:10), incorporate Leavitt's (1964) four-fold classification of human resources, administrative structures, technology and product or service, but also include the additional category of organisational history and culture. This final category provides for the historical perspective allowing for what Dawson (ibid:10) terms as "...competing histories and understanding of organisational culture". The interplay between the past, present and future is an important feature of this perspective, which demonstrates the complexity of organisational dynamics and also challenges processual researchers to identify an implementation process' start-point and its associated end-point (Dawson, 2003a).

Indeed, temporality and a historical appreciation are fundamental to the analysis as Mintzberg and Westley (1992:42) assert:

Any change to be really understood, therefore has to be viewed holistically and contextually as well as retrospectively.

Rationalist-purposive models usually tend to ignore social and historical contexts. An ideographic approach to analysis is careful, however, to include an examination of context and its interplay with implementation (Trowler, 2002 , Trowler and Knight, 2002).

### **2.7.3 Substance of Change**

Dawson (2003a:11) divides his final dimension of the substance of change into four sub-categories:

1. The scale and scope – ranging on a continuum from small and discrete to large-scale transformations
2. The defining characteristics – referring to the labels attached to the project and the actual content of the change/implementation question
3. The timeframe – timeframes can be variable and progress from apparently instant to those that develop over a number of years. It is important to examine the timeframe associated with the initiative and the lead up and subsequent implementation of the initiative
4. The perceived centrality of the initiative – to what extent is the initiative viewed as being critical to the survival of the organisation. The degree to which the initiative is viewed as critical can affect the implementation in relation to timescale, resourcing, support and commitment of employees.

These categories provide a mechanism by which to consider the construction of participants of the actual initiative itself. As with the context of change, the sub-categories identified by Dawson (2003a) are dynamic and can overlap with the context and political dimensions.

Dawson (ibid:12) describes the overall aim of his processual perspective:

In short, the processual framework outlined above is concerned with understanding: the political arenas in which decisions are made, histories recreated and strategies rationalized (politics); the enabling and constraining characteristics of change programmes and the scale and type of change (substance); and the conditions under which change is taking place in relation to external elements, such as the business market environment and internal elements, including the history and culture of an organization (context).

#### ***2.7.4 Implementing Dawson's Perspective and Planned Change***

The implementation of AFI in the university was conceived as a planned initiative within the university. Dawson's perspective supports the analysis of a planned approach to implementation, appropriate for an ideographic policy study. Dawson's perspective divides the process into three constituent parts, which can be linked to Lewin's (1947 , 1951) research into implementing behaviour and concluded that for a process to be successful it needed to follow three steps; 1- unfreezing, 2- moving and 3- freezing at the new level or refreezing. Described by Dawson (2003a) as: the conception of the implementation likened with the unfreezing stage; the transition as the phase of implementation or the changing/moving phase and finally the operation or the integration of the implementation within the organisation equated with the refreezing stage. This division of the implementation process does not accept that a single linear approach to implementation occurs or that one valid account exists it and in doing so remains faithful to Pettigrew's (1985b) conceptualisation of processual research.

## 2.8 Theoretical Framework Conclusion

The theoretical framework of this study has been developed to engage with the central research question of this study as to how implementation of a planned initiative (AFI) occurred in practice within the university. The conceptual framework is informed by ideographic notions of policy implementation and the rejection of purely rational-purposive conceptions of implementation processes. The processual/contextualist perspective provides a useful basis to conduct an ideographic study. It rises to the challenge identified by Trowler (2002:5) of considering institutional implementation:

At the institutional level, as at the national, policy-making and policy implementation are more likely to be the result of negotiation, compromise and conflict than of rational decisions and technical solutions, of complex social and political processes than careful planning and the incremental realisation of coherent strategy.

The perspective's inclusion of politics is an important feature as it opens the black box of political and power issues confronting implementers on the various levels of the implementation staircase. Furthermore, by including the conceptualisation of the implementation staircase the analysis can consider potential implementation gaps as implementation evolves. The next chapter sets out the methodology and research design implemented within this study.

### **3 Methodology**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter sets out the research design and methodology applied to investigate policy implementation within the university, which is underpinned by a social constructionism epistemology. This research is considered in terms of taking an institutional ethnography approach to investigating the practice of implementers of AFI. The theoretical and epistemological assumptions of this study differ with the institutional ethnography approach as they ultimately reject that one true account of implementation exists. This study is not concerned with establishing the ruling forces within the organisation that transcend AFI, which are at the centre of an institutional ethnography. The study does seek to uncover through the constructed accounts of participants the complexity of the process of implementation within the university within their socially mediated contexts.

The overarching research design focuses on the development of a single case study (Yin, 2009). The case study is characterised as an intrinsic case (Stake, 1995). The research design incorporates a longitudinal strategy to data collection which is consistent with processual and implementation research. The case study as a process and as a result of research is considered in this chapter (Stake, 2000). The data collection methods used to inform the case are also considered in this chapter and include interviews and documentary data collection. The limitations associated with each method are considered and contextualised in relation to the limitations of a single insider researcher conducting a policy implementation study. Incorporated within this examination, is the implication of the theoretical framework on the case study research design, which includes the contemplation of data collection points and longitudinal research. Ethical issues are considered throughout the chapter, as is the role of the researcher engaged in research in her place of work. Protocols

associated with confidentiality and anonymity of participants are explained, along with the presentation of participant contributions. The chapter concludes with an examination of the data analysis strategies available to processual research as described by Langley (1999). A range of analytical strategies were employed in this study and include; thematic, narrative, visual mapping and data matrices. These strategies facilitated the researcher to adopt an iterative approach to data reduction, analysis and presentation.

### **3.2 Epistemological Considerations**

The epistemological assumptions underpinning this study are categorised under a constructivist-interpretative approach to qualitative research and more specifically to social constructionism. These assumptions include; that individuals construct, interpret and interact with their reality, that individuals can exist within the same empirical world yet hold different constructs of that reality, and finally that realities and meanings exist within situated contexts and change over time (Patton, 2002). An important element of these assumptions for this research is the role that wider contexts play in the meanings and realities individuals use to make sense of their world (Crotty, 1998). This study is inherently situated within this perspective as the emphasis of the inquiry concerns the examination of how participants' realities and context(s) change over time. The importance of the interpretation of events by those involved and the development and evolution of interpretations (Dawson, 2003a , Pettigrew, 1985c , Yanow, 2000) is a feature of social constructionism, where past experiences and current contexts influence sense-making engaged in by individuals (Flick, 2007). Fischer (2003b:130-131) describes this process of construction as the production of accounts of science by observers, placing the emphasis on "human meaning-making" (Yanow, 2003:241). In the context of this study of policy implementation, policy problems or issues are not simply "out there" as current structures, situations or events, but rather they are the result of "complicated



processes of inscription and re-iteration” (Gottweis, 2003:249). The processual/contextualist perspective used in this study supports thick-description or thick-particularity (Fischer, 2003b) which ties in with Geertz’s (1973) notion that many events cannot be reduced to simplistic linear interpretations and that thick description is needed to represent their inherent complexity.

Thick description is provided within study to set acts and events within context, centring on individual social understandings and intentions of actions and events, tracing the development and evolution of both, and providing a textual account for the reader to engage with his own interpretation (Denzin, 1989). Actors and context, therefore, are central tenets of the study and temporality is of significance. Yanow (2003:236) describes this as the accessing of “...local knowledge...derived from lived experience”. Context and interpretation influence translation and implementation of policy (Ball, 1994). Further to this, the study is influenced by Blumer’s (1969) emphasis on interpreting and situating current action by considering historical actions and contexts. This is also considered from the perspective of policy implementation literature which holds that a study of policy must consider the area prior to implementation (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1984).

In the case of this research, the context of change in the processual/contextualist perspective, provides this historical backdrop internally within the institution i.e. modularisation and the evolution of teaching and learning structures but it also provides an insight into wider external contexts i.e. Bologna, sectoral competition, which shape current actions and sense making of actors. Furthermore, and in recognition of the study’s epistemological assumptions the study rejects the notion that one account of policy implementation exists, which is consistent with a rejection of one true objective reality (Flick, 2009). This study incorporates and accepts the notion of the existence of multiple plausible and perhaps conflicting interpretations of

events and actions (Fischer, 2003b:135). With respect to social constructionism the study incorporates a monist approach and does not distinguish "...between the actual state of affairs and perceptions, interpretations, or reactions to those affairs..." (Patton, 2002:102) in contrast with the dualist approach to social constructionism (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). In the case of this study the adequacy of the interpretations of participants is not distinguished or questioned against "...the objective features of the domain and member's representation of those features" (Patton, 2002:102). The findings demonstrate in some instances, however, a coalescing around meaning by participants (Guba and Lincoln) which supports the notion of shared and socially-constructed meaning by actors (Flick, 2009).

Further to this, adopting a monist approach also carries implications for the study with respect to the processual/contextualist approach of conducting the analysis of implementation (Fischer, 2003a , Pettigrew, 1990 , 1992). Reynolds and Saunders (1987) implementation staircase provides a useful tool to conceptualise levels and to situate participants within the institution. Participants representation are then provided to provide insight into how policy is interpreted, mediated and re-interpreted by individuals at these levels (Ball, 1994 , Bowe et al., 1992) but does not distinguish or judge the adequacy of those representations in the context of the level. A final epistemological assumption of this study is that the case study is a second-degree construction (Flick, 2009) i.e. a construct of the subjective construct of participants (Schütz, 1962). Flick (2009:77) outlines the process of this construction of reality as being based on the subjective construct of participants, which is then constructed through the scientific based or reasoned constructions of the researcher in the collection, treatment and interpretation of data and finally in the presentation of findings. In summary, the epistemology adopted within this study

rejects a positivist or post-positivist approach of establishing “assumed conditions and relations” from the theoretical literature to be operationalised and then empirically tested (Flick, 1998:41). The flexibility of a qualitative approach and the constructivist paradigm provides for a flexible exploration of the research question.

The paradigm supports an inductive approach to knowledge generation and is consistent with the research aims; to provide a situated, multi-framed, contextualised account of policy implementation. The study is designed to provide a situated, contextualised account and therefore, the worldview of the researcher is interlinked with the construction of this account. Furthermore, the literature review identified the issues of adopting linear approaches to policy implementation and recipe-based or formulaic approaches to considering organisational change. The emphasis of the theoretical frame on context and the creation of multiple realities based on the interpreted constructions of participants further embeds this study within the qualitative approach to research. The methodological and interpretative processes by which scientific understanding is facilitated within this study is dealt with in greater detail in the remainder of this chapter.

### 3.3 Institutional Ethnography

Smith (2005:1) describes institutional ethnography as discovering how “the everyday world of experience is put together by relations that extend beyond the everyday”. The basis by which a researcher of institutional ethnography conducts such research is to engage with those people within the institution who are actively engaged with a social process (Campbell, 1998). Levinson, Sutton and Winstead (2009:776) state that the researcher then moves to consider:

...how institutional structures and practices, including policies become texts that help shape and organise everyday experience.

An objective of institutional ethnography is to uncover “how does it happen as it does” (Campbell and Gregor, 2002:7) or as Smith (1987:178) states:

...to disclose how matters come about as they do in their experience and to provide methods of making their working experience accountable to them...

The central research question of this study may be aligned with such an approach and Campbell's (1998:62) description of what an institutional ethnographer does encapsulate similar objectives related to the institutional case study:

...to search out, come to understand and describe the connections among these sites of experience and social organisation. My sense-making is not just insightful interpretation. Nor am I looking for it to be an instance of theory. Rather, it is disciplined by the relations that organize or coordinate what actually happens among those involved...

This study adopts the research approach of involving those engaged in the implementation of AFI within the institution based on an ideographic conception of the policy process. The theoretical framework of this research moves beyond the rational-purposive model of policy and the consideration of policy as text towards the notion of policy as practice, which is in line with a growth of literature within education emphasising a socio-cultural analysis of policy (Ball, 1997 , Ball, Maguire and Braun, 2011 , Gerrard and Farrell, 2013 , Heimans, 2012 , Levinson et al., 2009 , Trowler, 2008 , Trowler and Knight, 2002). Ideographic policy and institutional

ethnography both consider policy as the dynamic practice of implementers, with institutional ethnography focusing on the "...jurisdictional relationships and inter-site contexts that characterises educational policy production and practice" (Gerrard and Farrell, 2013:3). Institutional ethnography as with ideographic notions of policy reject rationalistic models and it seeks to unravel the ways by which the power of social dynamics "...construct the ground of local experience" (Levinson et al., 2009:775). The emphasis, however, is not to explain findings at a local level through a macro level theory but rather to explore the macro level ethnographically as opposed to theoretically (Smith, 2005).

Institutional ethnography's sociology of knowledge centres the account of the "subordinate" to provide insight into the social relations and structures within institutions which can include those of excluded groups (Levinson et al., 2009:776, Smith, 1987). This study, however, does not view participants from the perspective of subordinates or indeed excluded groups. It does, nonetheless, attempt to ensure that the perspectives of participants are preserved within the findings, which is aligned with the notion of empowerment in institutional ethnography (Nichols and Griffith, 2009). Furthermore, this study does not attempt to invalidate one participant account of his/her experience with that of another's so that we argue "...truthfully or faithfully" (Smith, 1987:122) for one particular account of implementation. This issue reflects a fundamental disjuncture between an institutional ethnography approach and the theoretical framework and epistemological framework of this study. Texts play an important part in institutional ethnography as they do in ideographic notions of policy. Within institutional ethnography they are used to consider how power is exercised and embedded within organisations, as they are viewed as an embodiment of institutional authority or as "special coordinators of people's activities" (Smith, 2006:65). These ruling relations are textual venues where power is formed and exercised across the institutions, textual venues can be considered in

terms of management, administrations, policy groups etc. (Wright, 2003). Texts or textual representations take many forms within institutions and include i.e. emails, forms, memos, minutes of meetings, templates, web, pages, systems etc. Texts can be replicated and reproduced and it is through this reproduction that the ruling relations hold power to effect and manage the experiences of those on the ground, without in many cases being known by the same (Campbell, 1998 , Campbell and Gregor, 2002). This study is broadly situated within a research focus identified by Smith (2006:68) as following text in action or the ways in which text or policy is engaged with through action. This is achieved in this study through the analysis of participants on various levels of the implementation staircase and also the implementation gap, by considering the canonical versus non-canonical practices of implementers i.e. differences between official policy text and local practices.

The implementation gap is similar to what Smith (1987:49) sees as the “line of fault” or where gaps occur between policy texts and their implementation and the management of participant experiences. Furthermore, through the analysis of the context, transition and operation of implementation the study embraces not only the production of the final texts defining AFI, but also previous versions of texts. These texts identified and linked to the contexts of implementation (identified by participants) and they formed the basis for the current textual representations of policy. AFI was the major teaching and learning policy initiative to happen within the university and substantial amounts of textual data were available to the researcher to construct both internal and external contexts by which to frame AFI. Interviews with those directly involved in the construction of texts associated with AFI provided an opportunity for the researcher to explore the constructions of implementers based on the events and event waves identified by participants. Furthermore, data from these interviews provided what Nichols and Griffith (2009:244) as an “analytical entry point” into the process of implementation and wider university processes. This

study differs from institutional ethnography's consideration of power in terms of inter-textual hierarchy (Gerrard and Farrell, 2013). Politics and power are considered in terms of Pettigrew's (1985b, 1985c) conceptualisation that policy implementation brings about tension in the organisation, threatening the position of some actors whilst providing opportunities to others within the context. Power and politics are emphasised within this study from the agentic perspective within the findings, as opposed to the analysis from discovering the overarching or underling structural forces or ruling relations within the university which perpetrates across all functions (Smith, 2006).

A singular analysis of ruling relations is considered overtly simplistic to engage with the complexity of social settings. This study's theoretical framework similarly respects the complexity of social relations and as such incorporates understandings of policy from an ideographic basis. This study is not concerned with establishing the ruling forces within the organisation that transcend AFI but does seek to uncover through the constructed accounts of participants the complexity of the process of implementation within the university within social contexts. Gerrard and Farrell (2013) identify salient methodological issues for an institutional ethnographer, one of which is the issue of access to meanings, understandings and indeed actions within an implementation environment. A significant feature of this research is that the researcher held a complete membership role within the institution (Adler and Adler, 1987, Brannick and Coghlan, 2007) and was facilitated to engage with this study as institutional research. Issues relating to access and insider research are discussed further in this chapter but support by the institution to complete this research increased the credibility and trustworthiness of the researcher undertaken this study. Methodologically within this study the analysis is concentrated on participant data and as such it is sorted and coded based on Dawson's (2003a) framework to produce the case narrative. The emphasis within the method differentiates from

institutional ethnography which usually adopts an inductive approach to identify patterns from participant data from multiple sites. The researcher then extrapolates from these to uncover social relations and ultimately align to the wider social organisation (Campbell and Gregor, 2002). The remainder of the chapter sets out the study's design and considers the principal methods implemented in to engage with a socio-cultural based analysis of policy implementation.

### 3.4 Designing the Study

Flick (2007) and Mason (2002) advise researchers to design qualitative research from a qualitative perspective rather than from a quantitative understanding of research design which is seen "...an entire advance blueprint" (Mason, 2002:24). Yet Yin (2009:26) advises the researcher to view research design as the "logical plan for getting from here to there". Designing research using a qualitative understanding of the research design process – involves continued engagement with research design from the start of a study to its completion (Mason, 2002). This section outlines the considerations, decisions and rationale underpinning the research design developed for and during this study. This description is guided by consideration of components of qualitative research design as described by both Flick (2009:128) and Mason (2002:45) in their consideration of core issues for qualitative research design, Table 4:

**Table 4 – Components of Qualitative Research Design**

• Goals of the study
• Theoretical framework & background to the research
• Research questions or problem
• Methodological Approach
• Selection of empirical material
• Methods & techniques of data generation
• Degree of standardisation and control
• Generalisation goals
• Temporal, personal and material resources available
• Ethical, moral and political issues
• Plans for a pilot study
<b>Source: Adapted from: (Flick, 2009:128) and (Mason, 2002:45)</b>



### 3.5 Theoretical Framework and Methodological Considerations

The theoretical framework adopted to analyse policy implementation influenced considerations of research design and data collection. Data for the case was collected, analysed and presented based on the processual/contextualist perspective. Within this perspective three stages of implementation are conceived of; the conception, the transition and the operation of implementation (Dawson, 2003a). The conception of implementation is rationalised as the context of implementation prior to the implementation of the planned implementation initiative known as the Academic Framework for Innovation (AFI). The focus of this stage is on the development a construction of the contexts both internal and external prior to the decision to adopt AFI. Data to inform the transition stage is analysed from the perspective of the AFI project team and other, university personnel, including those who conceived the original framework and then those who were particularly assigned to manage and implement the project across the university – it incorporates the substance and politics of implementation (ibid).

Data informing the operation of implementation, which cover the politics and substance of change is analysed from the perspective of one faculty and those participants engaged in academic administration and in other academic positions (ibid). The boundaries between stages are, however, slightly blurred, which is consistent with the conception of implementation as a non-linear staged process (Dawson, 2003a). A processual/contextualist perspective is focused on a way to examine, analyse and explain implementation. It is not centred on providing a grand theory of implementation but rather what is of interest to the perspective is implementation and people within organisations (Dawson, 2003a:26) or as studies of “...actors and systems in motion” (Pettigrew, 1985c:287). Competing realities and narratives whether individual or group are central to the perspective providing for a critical interpretation of the process (ibid:27).

These considerations have important implications for methodological design, including data collection points and data sources. The three stages of implementation guided data collection points. The methods implemented within the study are consistent with other processual/contextualist and policy analysis studies. Institutional ethnography, policy implementation and the processual/contextualist encourages a longitudinal approach to data collection but is cognisant of the limitations of completing such analysis in the organisational setting and the restrictions that are on individual researchers and research studies (Pettigrew, 1990). Dawson (2003a) states that a number of approaches can be adopted to conduct longitudinal processual research through a considered use of methods. A longitudinal design is incorporated in the development of the case study of implementation within the university. This is facilitated through the examination of the planned change project but also through the construction of a historical context (Yin, 2009).

Data collection methods and sources used to inform the case include:

- Interview data (e.g. interview data compiled from national quality agency, university personnel including AFI project group)
- Documentation or texts (e.g. memoranda, agendas, minutes of meetings, written reports of events, contact data sheets, email correspondence, administrative documentation including proposals, progress reports and other internal records, personal project files, formal studies evaluating the implementation of AFI, public presentations and papers and conferences)

Pettigrew (1990 , 1992) advocates the collection of data which he describes as, processual, i.e. an emphasis on action, comparative, i.e. studies completed in a number of sectors, pluralist, i.e. a range of actors feed into the case with potentially competing realities, historical, i.e. the study incorporates a historical evolution and

finally contextual, i.e. which examines the reciprocal relationship between context and process. The current study incorporates four of these five principles within its data collection methods. The limitations associated with a single researcher (time and access) restricted the study being extended to multiple sectors and the inclusion of Pettigrew's comparative principle was not feasible for this study. The following section critically discusses the case study methodology and the data collection methods used to inform the case.

### **3.5.1 Case Study**

Stake (1995:xi) defines a case study quite simply as:

A case study is expected to catch the complexity of a single case.

Stake (2000 , 2010 , 1995) differentiates between intrinsic and instrumental case study. An intrinsic study as defined by Stake, is a study where the case is usually pre-selected, where we "have an intrinsic interest in the case" (Stake, 1995:3). The aim of this study is to learn as much from the individual case as opposed to studying the case to understand other cases or to learn more about some other general issue or research question. Instrumental studies on the other hand cater for our attempt to understand some general research question. One objective of this study is to provide a contextualised in-depth exploration of policy implementation within one university and therefore the use of a case study approach is consistent with this goal. The researcher has an intrinsic interest in the case as she is employed in the university and participated in the AFI implementation process. Yin (2009) categorises case studies based on their objectives and on the research questions (how or why) i.e. the case study is exploratory, descriptive or explanatory. Using Yin's categorisation this study is categorised as being mainly descriptive as it aims to provide an in-depth contextualised account of the case. The thematic analysis of this rich narrative data seeks to consider the findings based on the theoretical

framework underpinning this study. Miles and Huberman (1994:25) describe a case “as a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context”. The implementation question of this study is centred on the development of a descriptive constructed account. The central research question focuses on “*how*” and is consistent with social science research underpinned by a social-constructionist epistemology (Flick, 2009). The study’s methods are used by the researcher to construct a construction mainly based on the account of implementers. Eisenhardt’s (1989a:534) definition of a case, is particularly insightful for an ideographic study, when she states:

...a research strategy which focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings.

Stake’s (2000:444) following assertion is an important feature of this study in achieving its objective as an independent piece of institutional research:

A case study is both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry.

The use of a case study approach, therefore, necessitates a consideration of both the case study as a research design but also as the outcome of research, i.e. a case. The case of AFI as a finding will be presented to the institution. The selection of a case to study can also be viewed in relation to the bounding of the case. This study is bound by its focus on the policy implementation process (Miles and Huberman, 1994:26-27). Tight (2009:337) suggests that in essence case study research is a detailed examination of a small sample using a particular perspective. He suggests that the use of the term in-depth study is more appropriate due to the confusing terminology associated with case study research (ibid). It is important, however, to bear in mind Stake’s (1995) assertion in relation to intrinsic case study research and Tight’s (2009) criticisms which essentially arrive at similar conclusions:

Case study research is not sampling research. We do not study a case primarily to understand other cases. Our first obligation is to understand this one case.

(Stake, 1995:4)

### **3.5.2 Case Study Design and Issues**

Using Yin's (2009:46-47) categorisation this study takes the form of an embedded single case study. Yin (ibid) asserts that the selection of a single case design is appropriate if the study serves a longitudinal purpose, which he defines as studying the case at more than one point in time which is consistent with the design and theoretical foundation of the research study. Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to this within a single social setting where many sub-settings/groups exist. The researcher, therefore, should decide on what elements within the case he/she should focus on and understand the limits this focus bears on the conclusions drawn. Patton (2002) advises the researcher to adopt a type of layered approach to case study research. In this study participants at two levels of the implementation staircase were selected to inform the study.

### **3.5.3 Limitations and the Research Design**

Limitations of access and timeframe required the researcher to engage in elements of case study design which were similar to a historical strategy to complete data collection and consequently analysis (Yin, 2009). The limitation of access was greatly reduced in terms of researching implementation but issues of access did remain, i.e. the researcher as a single researcher was unable to be present at all events relating to AFI across the university within faculties and individual schools; the conception phase of AFI was well underway before the study commenced. To this end the research design is consistent and coherent of the limitations associated with a single researcher engaging with research and has been adapted to engage with the limitations of access and temporality.

### **3.5.1 Generalisation and the Research Design**

The limitations on qualitative research design hold for this research and in line with Patton's (2002) advice, the findings of the study are reported within context. The study is not concerned with making causal inferences. Therefore, as Yin (2009) suggests, issues of internal validity are not associated with this study. External validity or attempting to establish if a case study's findings are generalisable is an issue often contested in case study research. Stake (1995) argues that case studies may appear to provide a poor basis for the production of generalisations in contrast with more traditional studies. He does admit that these studies are more suitable for the production of generalisations. However, he does suggest that case study research like other research does not always produce new generalisations but does have the capacity to modify a generalisation stating:

Seldom is an entirely new understanding reached but refinement of understanding is.

(Stake, 1995:7)

These refinements can occur throughout the case study and Stake labels them petite generalisations. He argues further that case study research can produce modifications to grand generalisations through the use of triangulation. Kanter (1977:397) explains succinctly how she used triangulation to refine her findings:

I used each source of data, and each informant, as a check against the others. In this way, consistent tendencies could be noted. Nothing that I report was totally unique or true of only one person.

Triangulation is multi-faceted and can involve either methods, sources, analyst and finally theory or perspective (Patton, 2002). It is important to note that the purpose of triangulation is not to replicate the same data but rather to test for consistency as was the case with Kanter's approach (Patton, 2002 , Stake, 2010). Stake's (1995)

emphasis though is on the particularity of the case or as Patton (2002:447) practically describes the purpose of using a case study approach:

...is to gather comprehensive, systematic, and in-depth information about each case of interest.

Yin (2009) supports the use of theory within case studies to improve their external validity but he also recognises that theory influences other elements of research design. In the case of this study, the theoretical framework provides a means to build a construction of the case of AFI implementation. The following sections of this chapter set out the data sources and collection techniques adopted and associated procedures of this study.

### **3.5.2 Qualitative Interviewing**

The research design incorporates the following rationale for including qualitative interviews as part of the study:

... you may wish to explain something about social process, social change, social organisation, social meaning and you will argue that this requires an understanding of depth and complexity in, say, people's situated or contextual accounts and experiences, rather than a more superficial analysis of surface comparability between accounts of large numbers of people.

(Mason, 2002:65)

Implications for engaging in such a research strategy lie in the collection of data in the interview, the analysis of interview data and the approach to the construction of arguments from the data (ibid). Kvale (2007:8) describes a qualitative interview as:

...an interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena.

Mason (2002) suggests that the interviewing strategy will not rely on asking a standardised question of all interviewees, but rather questions will differ depending on the interviewee in an effort to maximise the generation of situated knowledge from each interviewee (ibid). Kvale's (1996 , &, 2007) two metaphors of the interviewer as a miner or as a traveller, capture two contrasting theoretical understandings of interview research and the knowledge produced during the interview process. This research has previously identified itself with providing "...an understanding of depth and complexity in, say, people's situated or contextual accounts..." (ibid:65). It incorporates further the role of the researcher in the construction of these meanings and, therefore, the metaphor of the traveller best fits this research's underlying epistemological position. During this journey, guided with or without maps, the researcher engages in conversations with participants encouraging "...them to tell their own stories of their lived world" (ibid:19). The researcher interprets the meanings of these stories and constructs them in her own country – leading not only to new knowledge but also leading to a process of reflective change and new understandings for the traveller (ibid:20). Mason (2002:63) associates the traveller metaphor with that of qualitative interviewing when she states that this form of interviewing tends to incorporate "...the construction or reconstruction of knowledge more than the excavation of it". She goes on further to support Kvale when she reflects on the traveller's interaction with the inhabitants i.e. the interaction of the researcher and the interviewees as an important step in the co-production of knowledge (Mason, 2002:63). Data from interviews are used mainly in the case construction in this study. Based on the study's epistemological position the study viewed interview data as accounts where meaning was actively constructed (Silverman, 2006). This treatment of data suggests that participant during interviews interpret and re-interpret meaning based within their own socially-mediated contexts and ways of knowing (ibid).



### 3.5.3 Documents

The collection of documents is viewed as an important aspect in case study research (Yin, 2009), within this study documents are viewed as constructed data. The term document is used to cover the myriad of communications within the institutional context and is concentrated mainly on formal or official communications (official documents, reports, emails) by the institution and by participants. Scott (1990:6) uses four criteria to evaluate personal documents; authenticity, meaningfulness, credibility and representativeness see Table 5.

**Table 5 – Questioning the Quality of Documents**

Authenticity	Is the document genuine and of unquestionable origin
Credibility	Is the evidence free from error and distortion
Representative	Is the evidence typical of its kind, and if not, is the extent of its untypicality known
Meaning	Is the evidence clear and comprehensible
<b>Source: Adapted from (Scott, 1990)</b>	

Bryman (2004) suggests that these criteria are also useful in the evaluation of formal documentation, whilst Coghlan and Brannick (2001:93) suggest that the researcher should ask the following questions in relation to documentation:

- Who collected the data?
- When was it collected?
- What was collected?
- Why was it collected?

Another important question that Flick (2009) states is important for researchers to pose, is what has been left out of the document by whom and why? Wolf (2004) advises the researcher to treat documents with care and to realise that they need not be the source of objective fact or reality in comparison to subjective interviews. Flick (2009) reiterates the necessity for criticality and asserts that documents should be viewed as a version of constructed reality and as a means of contextualising information. It is based in this perspective that documents are analysed within this study, whilst recognising that documents provide a limited if not abstracted

construction of experiences and processes (ibid). In this study emphasis is placed on interview data to engage with the constructions of implementers. Furthermore, the researcher was cognisant of the limitations of access, time and availability associated with using documents as a data source and engaged in strategies to minimise these limitations such as the collection of official documentation from current and past members of university staff. An important step in the fieldwork was the provision and negotiation of access to potentially important and commercially sensitive documents and records. Approval of access was negotiated with university management. The researcher has minimal encounters with gatekeepers during the study who could have potentially have stifled, frustrated or manipulated access for the researcher (Patton, 2002).

#### **3.5.4 Data Collection – Access**

At the outset of the research study in 2008 the researcher contacted the President of the university to seek consent to complete the study. Consent was granted by the President. The researcher informed key stakeholders within the project of her research and provided a list of documents and personnel that would be included in this study. As part of the process the researcher was requested to provide an overview of the study to the committee steering the AFI project in December 2009. Support for the study was re-affirmed. The researcher provided details of her research to key personnel within the university as personnel in these roles changed.

#### **3.5.5 Data Collection and Research Design**

The preparation of the case study involved the collection of data mainly from implementers. As was indicated in the discussion of case study as a method, the bounding of a case is an important step (Yin, 2009). Miles and Huberman (1994) state that issues relating to sampling aid the definition and bounding of cases (ibid). They advise researchers undertaking single case studies that sampling strategies refer to the sampling of “informants” as well as to “...‘cases taken’ as a whole”

(ibid:28). Sampling provided a means for the researcher to bound the case of implementation, whilst also recognising that sampling was engaged with at various stages of the research process, from the collection and interpreting of data to the presentation of findings (Flick, 1998: 63). Within this study, criterion based sampling was used for data collection, Table 6. An inherent relationship exists between the criterion and the university structures. For example, data are drawn from university personnel associated with implementing the AFI project, faculty structures and finally, current and former teaching and learning personnel within the university. The association of these participants on the implementation staircase is also outlined in Table 6. These structures are clarified further, within the case study. Convenience based sampling was used to inform the analysis of the transition and operation at the faculty level i.e. the researcher had access to events and to data points in her complete member role within the organisation. Overlaps exist, however, between data sources e.g. some personnel involved in the AFI project would also be considered personnel associated with teaching and learning structures within the university and/or faculty.

**Table 6 – Data Collection Criterion**

	<b>Criterion</b>
<b>AFI Project – Institutional Level</b>	Participants assigned, with responsibility, advisory or with oversight for elements of the implementation process of the project known as AFI within the university. Participants with teaching and learning managerial or strategic responsibility in the university. University documentation associated with the AFI project or referencing the AFI project
<b>Faculty – Departmental Level</b>	Participants engaged with programme administration, management and oversight or teaching and learning responsibility over the period of the project 2008-2011. Participants engaged with programme and teaching and learning co-ordination within faculty and within Schools University and faculty documentation associated with teaching and learning and/or referencing the AFI project
<b>Teaching and Learning Structures – Departmental Level</b>	Participants and documentation associated with or referencing teaching and learning within the university

### 3.5.6 Data Collection Points

As previously stated, the theoretical framework adopted influenced considerations of data collection, as data was required to engage with three stages; the conception, the transition and the operation of change (Dawson, 2003a). A critical element of processual and implementation research is longitudinal design as processual research encapsulates a time frame in which to examine change (ibid:97). The longitudinal design included an interview strategy over three years and the analysis of documentary data covering a circa twenty year period, 1984-2011 to inform the conception, i.e. context. In the case of transition, AFI project documentary data was collected over the period of six years from data 2005-2011. For operation documentary data was collected over the same period. Interviews were completed over the period 2008-2011. Yin (2009) describes longitudinal research in terms of the repeated engagement with a research question as opposed to the once off collection of research data. The research design within is characterised by multiple interviews with participants and the sustained collection of documentary data, Table 7.

**Table 7 – Data Sources Implementation**

	<b>Interview</b>	<b>Documentary Evidence</b>
<b>Conception</b>	√	√
<b>Transition</b>	√	√
<b>Operation</b>	√	√

Temporality is an important dimension in policy implementation and for conducting interviews (Kvale, 2007). Dawson (2003a), reflecting on the practicalities of doing processual, longitudinal research and issues related to temporality, states that a range of pressures influence research design. The processual researcher must employ a variety of methods to ensure that data is collected during a number of specified periods (ibid). Issues of temporality and conducting interviews were considered as part of the study. Interviewing was restricted to the transition and

operational phase, as the study had not commenced in the conception phase. Interview data reflecting on the conception phase was, however, also collected from participants. Documentary evidence from the conception phase was also analysed. Within the transition and operational phases interviews were set around project and university events and the production of official policy texts so that data was collected during or close to periods of specific project or academic actions such as, the writing of learning outcomes, the period of alignment, or during the period academic programme board meetings. As with other studies, a research study's end-point can be a contested issue. An important consideration for this study was the restriction on the researcher in terms of thesis regulations but also the impact and relevance of the study as institutional research. In spite of this consideration the researcher decided to determine the end-point of the study in terms of the events and data provided by the study's participants. The final round of interview and documentary data for implementation was collected during the summer of 2011. The study's end-point is contextualised in processual research as an element of the setting of the "timeframe of reference for explaining change" (Dawson, 2003a:97).

### **3.5.7 Data Collection Procedures – Interview**

The interview diary is set out in Appendix 1. Eighty-seven interviews were completed over a three year period. Groups and labelling details for each participant are restricted to one group and label in this diary. Furthermore, the interview site is omitted from the diary in order to maintain confidentiality. The grouping and labelling of interview data sources within the case study was challenging as most participants fed into all three stages. An effort was made to balance the confidentiality of participants with the weight of their contribution based on their role within the project and within the university. To this end an overarching mechanism of groups was established and participants were labelled in relation to these groups: AFI management, university teaching and learning, AFI advisory, AFI associate, faculty

admin, faculty teaching and learning and programme teaching and learning. However, the danger of participant confidentiality being revealed existed if the use of particular labels remained consistent. The contribution of each participant is illustrated in Table 8 and their position on the implementation staircase is represented either by I for institutional or D for departmental.

**Table 8 – Group Associations & Implementation Staircase**

Label and Implementation Staircase Association	Conception	Transition	Operation
AFI Management - I	√	√	√
AFI Advisory – I	√	√	√
AFI Associate – D	√	√	
Faculty Administration		√	√
University teaching and learning – I	√	√	√
Faculty teaching and learning – D	√	√	√
Programme teaching and learning – D	√	√	√

Over twenty participants were assigned with two or more labels to protect their identity and each was provided with a unique identifier for each group. Participant contributions are presented in terms of one group. For example, a participant grouped as AFI associate in respect to the operation of change, is referenced using only one label in that stage. A generic matrix demonstrating the inter-linkages between groups is illustrated in Table 9.

**Table 9 – Linkages between participant groups**

	University Teaching and Learning	Faculty Teaching and Learning	Programme Teaching and Learning
AFI Management	√	√	
AFI Advisory	√		
AFI Associate		√	√

The data collection strategy facilitated changes to personnel and structures within the university and the project. Sampling criteria for participants is set out in Appendix 2. The criteria mainly followed the rationale of inviting successors to positions in the project and within university structures to interview. However, this

rationale was not implemented with participants from the group programme teaching and learning as annual changes can and usually occur within this group. To facilitate data collection from this group a sampling criterion was established to sample participants based on the duration of their role over the life-time of the AFI project and/or participation as an AFI associate. This criterion was established due to the overlap in role and link with both the AFI project and responsibility for programme teaching and learning.

### **3.5.8 Interview Protocol**

Interviews with participants were conducted mainly using a general interview guide approach but this approach integrated elements of a conversational approach to interviewing (Patton, 2002). This approach allowed the researcher to explore issues with participants, whilst providing the freedom for participants to develop particular areas or issues concerning them (ibid). The researcher before each interview developed or refined an interview guide based on the primary research questions and from her own interactions with the project. Similar interview guides were used with participants across groups. Interview guides incorporated a variety of question types including knowledge, experience and value. However, an effort was made to include as many open-ended questions, to allow the interviewee to direct the interview as much as possible (ibid). All interviewees completed a consent form, Appendix 3. Participants were contacted firstly by email, follow up calls and emails were sent to non-respondents. The researcher developed a rough interview guide based on the central research question; the guide incorporated a list of possible questions to be asked. The guide also asked the interviewee to comment on any aspect of Bologna, the AFI initiative and/or teaching learning structures to allow the interviewee scope to provide any additional information please see Appendix 4 for an example guide. All interviews were digitally recorded using a digital audio recorder; digital files were stored on the researcher's computer. After each interview

an interview summary sheet adapted from Miles and Huberman (1994) was completed see Appendix 5. Following this initial analysis of each interview, the researcher included and tagged any additional question raised by that interview to be added to the interview schedule. The transcription of interviews was facilitated through the use of software, F4 audio-transcription software<sup>2</sup>, developed by doctoral students at the Philipps University in Marburg, Germany and which is now freely available on the Internet. The transcription of an oral interview into a written text provides the researcher with a number of practical and theoretical issues, needing to be addressed as an integral part of the methodological process. Transcripts are described by Kvale (1996:163) as:

...not the rock bottom data of interview research, they are artificial constructions from an oral to a written mode of communication.

Mason (2002) goes on further to describe a transcription as "...always partial partly because it is an inadequate record of non-verbal aspects of the interaction". Silverman (2006) counsels the researcher to contrast the level of detail needed in transcriptions with the research problem and the analytic approach, whilst also considering issues of time and resources, whilst Kvale (1996) suggests that the style of transcriptions may also vary dependant on their use. Sack (1992) argues that the issue of completeness of data from oral data is perhaps an illusion and probably is as elusive as the faultless transcription. Indeed Kvale (2007:98) counsels the researcher not to ask the question "What is the correct valid transcription?" but rather "What is a useful transcription for my research purposes?". In view of these issues the researcher adopted an approach to transcription primarily centred on facilitating analysis; that approach is outlined as follows, with the treatment of conversational features described in Table 10.

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<sup>2</sup> F4 – <http://www.audiotranskription.de/english/downloads-en.html> is a free of charge standard software programme to transcribe audio files



**Table 10 – Treatment of Conversational Features in Transcription**

Feature	Example	Practice
Abbreviations	isn't, aren't, weren't	Transcribed i.e. not spelled out
Verbal Tics	er, um, em	Transcribed
Pauses	long pause, short pause	All pauses indicated by three dots "..."
Repetitions	What I mean to say, or I should say... and what I said	Transcribed verbatim no rendering of meaning
<b>Source: Adapted from (Arskey and Knight, 1999:196)</b>		

As the research did not include sociolinguistic or psychological analysis of the interviews, a richer descriptive transcription record of verbal conversation and the broader interview context was not completed e.g. recording of emotions or physical gestures etc. (Kvale, 1996 , 2007). Interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher and a team of transcribers, who signed confidentiality forms, Appendix 6. The researcher had no prior experience of transcription, and due to the nature of the confidentiality of the research had initially completed the transcriptions primarily by herself. However, as the volume of interviews increased, the researcher consulted with the university and was permitted to engage further transcribers to transcribe the remaining transcriptions. No re-organisation of the oral word into a more formal written style was attempted – although Kvale (1996:170-171) suggests that this “may be a desirable practice” dependant on the analysis. The researcher sought to avoid misinterpretation and the potential to skew subsequent analysis of the transcriptions through any such condensing. Peräkylä (2004) asserts that the skill of the transcriber develops with experience and the researcher found this to be the case. To improve the accuracy of transcriptions the following practice was adopted. After each interview was initially transcribed, the researcher listened to the interview again and simultaneously read through the transcription to remove inaccuracies, to include any previously inaudible comments and format segments. Transcripts were then spellchecked using a word processing tool. Each transcript was finally considered in relation to ethical issues – primarily relating to the maintenance of anonymity of the interviewees and their schools. Editing of each transcription was

completed to mask this information and a copy of the original and edited transcription was maintained. Although Peräkylä (2004) advises that another person check the transcript, issues relating to confidentiality prohibited the researcher from implementing this step to improve transcription reliability (Kvale, 2007).

### ***3.5.9 Documentary Data – Protocol***

The longitudinal design included in this study drew on documentary data covering a circa twenty year period covering the period 1984-2011. In respect to transition, documentary data was collected over the period of six years from data 2005-2011 and for operation, documentary data was collected over the period 2008-2011. The criterion for the sampling of documentation in relation to all mini-cases and macro-implementation is outlined in Table 6. The university agreed to the provision of documents to the researcher and the researcher received documents related to the project on request. This arrangement ensured the authenticity and credibility of these documents (Scott, 1990). Online published institutional documentation was also used throughout the research including minutes of meetings, agendas and other institutional documents. A number of participants provided older institutional documents including newsletters, communications and other publications not available in digital format. These documents or document segments were scanned into a digital format to facilitate data analysis. Some participants provided further documentary data to the researcher including email communications. A document consent form was signed by these participants and the researcher, Appendix 7 – outlining the scope of use of the documents.

### ***3.5.10 Participation in the Research and the Role of the Researcher***

Within this study the researcher held a complete membership role within the research setting (Adler and Adler, 1987 , Brannick and Coghlan, 2007) i.e. the researcher was and remains an employee of the institution. The advantages of participation as outlined by Yin (2009) relate primarily to issues of access i.e.

opportunities for data collection are increased because of access, where the researcher has the potential for increased understanding of the context of the case in contrast with an external researcher. Mercer's (2007) review of the literature on insider and outsider perspectives, outlines some of the many issues to be considered when conducting research within a researcher's employment setting. These issues are presented in this section and contextualised in respect of the study. Both Mullings (1999) and Mercer (2007) question the dichotomy of the insider/outsider debate and draw on the work of others to suggest that a continuum exists which is influenced by a number of factors. Insiders of an organisation can be treated as outsiders (ibid), dependent on the situation, topic of an interview and the interviewee, i.e. interviewing a colleague from the researcher's school or faculty where the researcher is (well) known can be contrasted with interviewing a member of senior management with whom the researcher would have minimal contact. An interviewee may be comfortable or prepared to treat the researcher as more of an insider in respect to specific topics and as an outsider on other topics (ibid). Drever (1991:31, In Mercer, 2007) describes the challenge for the researcher to engage with:

...people's willingness talk to you, and what people say to you, is influenced by who they think you are

Coghlan and Brannick (2001) reflect on these political concerns of completing insider research and they assert that the researchers must be able to manage a range of political interactions. They also highlight pre-understanding as a feature of insider research which incorporates knowledge based on theoretical understandings of organisational dynamics combined with personal experiences (ibid:54). Pre-understanding can aid the researcher in situations where they possess information in relation to the organisation not publicly available (i.e. decision-making structures) but the researcher must be careful that her understanding is not restricted or bounded by what she previously knows or has experienced in an organisation

(Gummesson, 1999:58-65). Difficulties may also arise when participants take it for granted that the researcher is aware of particular organisational issues or events and they sometimes withhold information based on the belief of pre-understanding by the researcher (Platt, 1981:79). Another issue for the insider researcher to engage with is selectivity, usually will have to select activities or events to provide data collection points (Flick, 2009). Selections are subject to limitations which are similar in definition to those outlined by Patton, i.e. time, access and researcher resources (2002). Although as an insider may imply easy access to events and participants, it is not always the case and the researcher may be intentionally be excluded by key participants in an effort to manipulate the study (Flick, 2009). The researcher did not have access to committees or meetings outside or beyond her professional capacity associated with the project, the university or the sector. Political issues within the organisation were considered as the researcher engaged with the access questions. The researcher felt that if she attended project management meetings perhaps she may become the subject of manipulative behaviour in relation to the study (Flick, 2009). Full access to such meetings was therefore not sought. The researcher received consent from the outset to conduct the research, she informed key personnel of her study and she undertook to be explicit and transparent about her research agenda.

### **3.6 Analysis Strategies**

The volume of data generated by processual research in particular, led Pettigrew (1990:281) to describe the obstacle faced by processual researchers as "...death by data asphyxiation". The qualitative data software NVivo 9 was used by the researcher to facilitate data organisation and analysis. The researcher in conducting a thematic analysis drew on Ryan and Bernard's (2003) in depth review of techniques to aid the identification and treatment of themes from the rich interview data. The study used the constructs identified within Dawson's (2003a) framework to

construct the narrative case study centred on three main categories associated with the context, substance and politics of change. Each of these categories contained sub-categories and interview data expressing an example of the same was sorted into these. Ryan and Bernard (2003) assert that social scientists use different terms in relation to themes which relate to discrete concepts but that categories, codes and labels are interchangeable. Following construction of the case narrative based on the processual/contextualist approach, a further analysis was conducted to identify expressions of policy as a process as identified within the theoretical framework under the following themes, incoherence in policy implementation, unanticipated consequences to purposive actions, contextually contingent outcomes and fluid implementation structures (Trowler, 2002 , Trowler, 2008 , Trowler and Knight, 2002).

The volume of data may constitute one challenge but a number of other issues faced the researcher in the analysis and manipulation of such data. Langley (1999:692) describes these concerns as the complexity of data. The fluid nature of data and the effort to situate data within context and usually multiple contexts presents a further complication (Pettigrew, 1992). The temporality associated with events may be oblique to a researcher attempting to document a sequence of events (Langley, 1999:692-693). Within this study participants identified contexts which spanned many years before AFI implementation one such was identified which ranged over a twenty year period prior to the researcher's employment with the university. The researcher had to engage with participants to uncover their constructions of these contexts, and to locate documentation from this period whilst attempting to develop her own construction. Collecting documents from this period involved contacting former employees of the university and the accessing of many personal archives.

Langley (1999) uses Weick's (1979 , 1995) principle of sensemaking to develop seven strategies to analyse, manipulate and present process data. Sensemaking for Langley (1999:694) implies that a "...variety of "senses" or theoretical understandings may legitimately emerge from the same data" – different theoretical interpretations may have varying strengths and weaknesses in interpreting the data, an issue that Langley considers important. Langley (ibid) also asserts that sensemaking allows the researcher to consider theory and data from varying perspectives either deductively or inductively, with perhaps numerous iterations between both. Within this study deductive categories were used to originally construct the case narrative and further themes were identified from the literature following this original a priori categorisation (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). Coffey and Atkinson (1996:158) support such an approach when they advise researchers that:

Theories are not added on only as a final gloss or justification...They are drawn on repeatedly as ideas are formulated, tried out, modified, rejected or polished.

Langley (1999) uses the categories of accuracy, generality and simplicity, based on the work of Thorngate (1976) and Weick (1979), to describe the theoretical content formed whilst implementing a range of analysis strategies, outlined in Table 11. Accuracy pertains to an analysis strategy that remains close to the data (Weick, 1979). The level of abstraction is thus limited. The consequence of an analysis with a high degree of accuracy is a lower degree of the second category generality i.e. that the abstraction can be applied to other cases or situations (Langley, 1999). The third category, simplicity refers to simply understood and constructed theories with good explanatory powers. These simple theories contrast with complex theories that may provide some modest degree of further explanation, but are neither readily understood nor simple in construction (ibid). Langley (1999) describes data in terms of depth and breadth in Table 11, with depth referring to the level of detail needed of a process and breadth linked to the number of cases needed.

### Table 11 – Seven Strategies for Sense Making\*

[illegible]

### 3.6.1 Analysis Strategy Selection

Based on Langley's (ibid) categorisation two sense making strategies were employed as part of the construction of the case; narrative and visual mapping. A further thematic analysis was conducted by the researcher. Weick (1979) suggests that all research strategies contend with trade-offs associated with accuracy, generality and simplicity. Langley (1999) positions the process analysis strategies in relation to each category, Table 12.

**Table 12 – Sense making Strategies and Accuracy, Simplicity and Generality**

Strategy	Accuracy	Simplicity	Generality
	High	Low	Low
Narrative	↑	↓	⋮
Grounded Theory			
Temporal Bracketing			
Visual Mapping			
Synthetic Strategy			
Quantification			
Computer Simulation			
	Low	High	High
The orderings in this table are approximate; there are variations among specific applications. In particular, while accuracy and simplicity are almost always in opposition to one another, the generality of emerging theories will depend on other factors, such as the degree and scope of replication and the source of conceptual ideas.			
<b>Source: Langley (1999:706)</b>			

Langley's (1999) positioning of strategies is an effort to demonstrate that process research can be undertaken using a variety or combination of these strategies depending on the research aims of the study; the data available; epistemological approach and the insight, creativity and imagination of the researcher to complete the research process (Weick, 1989). To aid with the selection and combination of research strategies, Langley (1999) provides the following sequentially related groupings of the sense making strategies, Table 13. Langley advises that these groupings provide a touchstone for the researcher engaging with process research and should not be viewed as a single solution for all research contexts (ibid).



**Table 13 – Grouping of Sense making Strategies**

<b>Grouping</b>	<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
Grounding	Grounded theory Alternative templates	Both strategies provide sources for concepts to be used in the context of other strategies – from data-driven categories of grounded theory to the theory driven constructs of alternative templates. The strategies represent the purist forms of inductive and deductive reasoning. They provide the basis to feed into other strategies such as narrative and quantification.
Organizing	Narrative Visual Mapping	Both strategies provide a description of tools to systematically organise process data, usually the first step taken in sensemaking. They also can feed into other strategies and can form the basis for hypothesis and propositions.
Replicating	Temporal Bracketing Quantification Synthesis	These strategies are considered replicating strategies as they allow for the decomposing or reduction of data for the replication of a theoretical proposition. Most other strategies feed into them.
<b>Source: Adapted from Langley (1999:707)</b>		

These strategies and their use within the research are elaborated on in the following sections.

### **3.6.2 Narrative Strategy**

Langley (1999) maintains that all studies make use of this strategy during process research at some point. The purpose of the narrative, however, varies depending on the researcher's objectives. For some researchers, it serves as a first step in organising data in preparation for analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989a). This step was taken in this study to prepare a case narrative as the narrative strategy holds a deeper analytical context in implementation research (Pettigrew, 1990). For those pursuing a naturalistic or constructivist perspective, it is the richness, detail and contextualisation of the narrative, i.e. the rich presentation of different viewpoints within the narrative that supports the reader in judging the transferability of the analysis to other "situations" (Langley, 1999:695). An analysis centred on this strategy is expected to be high in accuracy (Weick, 1979). The approach does not necessarily provide simple or general theory. Langley (1999:697), however,

recognises the benefit of the approach for “...communicating the richness of the context to readers, most of us expect research to offer more explicit theoretical interpretations”. Langley (ibid) considers that a narrative strategy can provide more than just an authentic account and it can aid the reader to apply what he/she has learnt to other situations (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993). Langley (1999:697) advises the researcher to combine the narrative strategy with another/or other analytic strategies to lessen the difficulty of “...telling the story and selling the plot...”. The subsequent thematic analysis was implemented by the researcher in an effort to avoid this pitfall associated with the narrative strategy.

### **3.6.3 Visual Mapping Strategy**

Narrative and grounded theory strategies typically provide analysis in an “extended text” format (Miles and Huberman, 1994:91). Miles and Huberman (ibid:91) argue for the integration of illustrative and matrix representations of data and analysis beyond pure text:

By display we mean a visual format that presents information systematically, so the user can draw valid conclusions and take needed action.

The displaying of data using illustrative or matrix forms allows for large quantities of data to be represented in reduced formats, provides a visual template for the development and refinement of theoretical constructs and represents data using various dimensions and contexts, e.g. temporality, precedents or antecedents and parallel processes (Langley, 1999:700). The use of such visual mapping strategies is described as an “intermediary step” (ibid). Miles and Huberman (1994) describe the process of developing and using visual displays as a natural step in analytic progression, as described in Carney’s (1990) ladder of analytical abstraction. This strategy increases flexibility in data reduction and synthesis, providing for moderate accuracy (Langley, 1999). Moderate generality and simplicity are features of this

strategy and the strategy can be a useful building block in the construction of theory (ibid). This strategy was used particularly in the development of the case and was a useful strategy to depict the development of issues and events associated with the research.

### **3.7 Methodology Conclusion**

The study is underpinned by a social constructionism epistemology. An embedded, longitudinal case design approach was adopted to engage with policy implementation (Yin, 2009). The research design incorporates and addresses the limitations of the study; particularly in reference to the researcher being a single researcher engaged with an in-depth study and in terms of access and as an insider within the organisations, a further limitation addressed by the design was the issue of temporality. The case study is categorised as an intrinsic case study (Stake, 2000, Stake, 1995). The researcher has a particular interest in this case as she is an employee of the university and has participated in the implementation of the project within the university. Furthermore, the study is identified by the university as independent institutional research. The role of the researcher was examined in the context of her being an insider within the organisation. These issues are important, as they have both ethical and political considerations for the researcher in her personal, professional capacity and also in terms of the study. The researcher adapted the research design in light of these issues to mitigate for partiality of access. Insider research and indeed qualitative research can raise issues relating to the subjectivity and objectivity of research. Patton (2002), however, argues that qualitative researchers instead of considering these terms, which are aligned with assessing rigour of quantitative research should focus on the terms which best describe the researcher's own inquiry processes and procedures. Following this advice, this chapter has set out the basis of the selection of data collection methods and analysis strategies. The following chapter presents this study's findings.

## 4 Findings

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a case study the implementation of the Academic Framework of Innovation. The case begins with a brief introduction to the contemporary Higher Education landscape in the Republic of Ireland. An overview of the university within study, DCU is also provided to inform the reader. The case continues by setting out internal and external contexts of implementation in the form of a narrative. This narrative is constructed and structured by the researcher around events and event waves identified from participants' data. This narrative is constructed from a retrospective analysis by the researcher using official university documentation. The second section of the case is a thematic analysis of the data categorised under the politics and substance of implementation which is used to answer the study's central research question and sub-question:

**How was the implementation of the Academic Framework of Innovation conducted within Dublin City University?**

- **Within an ideographic model of policy implementation, how is a planned change initiative implemented in practice in a university?**

The findings are presented thematically, and in the context of specific event waves under in an effort to provide clarity for the reader.

## 4.2 Landscape in the Republic of Ireland

The Irish Higher Education system is based on a binary structure of seven universities, thirteen Institutes of Technology (IOTs) and a range of private commercial institutions (Coolahan, 2004). Of the seven universities, two were established since the foundation of the state in 1922. In 1989, two National Institutes of Higher Education were conferred with university status; one of these was Dublin City University. The mandate of the new institutions as set out in the Universities Act 1997 included the advancement of knowledge through teaching and research, the promotion of cultural and social life in society, to support and to contribute to national economic and social advancement (Government of Ireland, 1997). Irish universities accredit and deliver undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and qualifications across a wide spectrum of disciplines. The OECD categorises the Irish universities as comparatively small by international standards, with a large number of Higher Education institutes (HEI) servicing a population of four million (OECD, 2004). University College Dublin attracts the largest student intake and National University of Ireland Maynooth the smallest (ibid). All universities are affiliated to the sector umbrella association, Irish University Association (IUA)<sup>3</sup> (Irish University Association, 2008). The governance of Higher Education rests with the Higher Education Authority (HEA) following on from the Institute of Technology Act in 2006, the HEA also provide policy advice to the government in respect of the sector. Irish universities are publicly funded institutions with funding amounting to at least eighty per cent of total institutional revenue (Coolahan, 2004), in some HEIs the State accounts for ninety per cent of total institutional income (Kerr, 2006).

In 1996, the government abolished full-time undergraduate fees under the Free Fees Initiative (Coolahan, 2004), the State accounted for seventy per cent of institutional income when students did pay fees (Kerr, 2006). Massification and the universality of

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<sup>3</sup> Formerly the Conference of the Heads of Irish Universities (CHIU)

the Irish Higher Education system occurred over the last three decades (Trow, 1974) and reported participation rates have now reached 55 per cent (McCoy, Byrne, O'Connell, Kelly and Doherty, 2010). School-leavers constitute the largest section of new-entrants into higher education (HE) in Ireland. Trends indicate continued growth in their numbers from 2012 onwards with migration expected to add to this growth (ibid). Entry for school-leavers is determined on points, which are awarded on performance levels obtained in six subjects in the national state examination held at the end of second level schooling (Coolahan, 2004). Courses in universities usually require higher points than courses in IOTs (ibid). CAO acceptances of places in universities remains nearly half the total acceptances into the HE system; in 2006 this figure represented 18 226 of the total 38 995 acceptances into HEA institutions (Higher Education Authority, 2006). Full-time undergraduate courses attract the majority of new entrants into Irish universities; part-time students are ineligible for the free fees initiative or maintenance grants (ibid). A national strategy for Higher Education was published in 2011, and it called for a major review and consolidation of the sector to support and further national economic recovery (HEA, 2011). By 2012, all HEIs must outline their unique mission and position in the national HE landscape along with their proposals for clustering and mergers with other HEIs (HEA, 2012b).

### **4.3 Dublin City University**

Dublin City University (DCU) celebrated the granting of University Status in 1989, having previously been established as the National Institute for Higher Education Dublin (NIHE) in 1975. This was a significant step by the Government in light of a dismal economic environment (Bradley, 1999). The Government tasked the new institution to work closely with industry and to assist with economic recovery through research and through the provision of a skilled workforce to attract international companies and to develop indigenous enterprise (ibid). The university engaged with this through; the establishment an Industrial Advisory Council, the creation of

internship programmes in industrial settings for undergraduate and postgraduate students, delivering combined theoretical and applied disciplinary educational, attracting major research funding and establishing national and international research centres (ibid). The University has an acknowledged focus on multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary research and academic programmes (IUQB, 2010).

The university has grown considerably in the intervening years. DCU has four faculties comprising 15 Schools, the Faculty of Engineering and Computing, the Faculty of Science and Health, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences and DCU Business School. In 2010 close to 11,000 students were registered in DCU. The university's research capacity has increased significantly and it has 18 research centres and an enterprise innovation/incubation unit (IUQB, 2010). In 2010, the university inaugurated its third President, who encapsulated how the University will fulfil the strategic mission as the University of Enterprise into the future:

...prioritise engagement with the enterprise sector (be it commercial, social or cultural)...focus on issues of direct societal importance...contribute to national economic, social and cultural progress, especially in our...within an inclusive and student-centric environment

(Mac Craith, 2010: 7)

The University was ranked in both the Times Higher Education '100 under 50' and QS World Top 50 under 50 in 2012 (DCU, 2012) and again in 2013 (DCU, 2013).

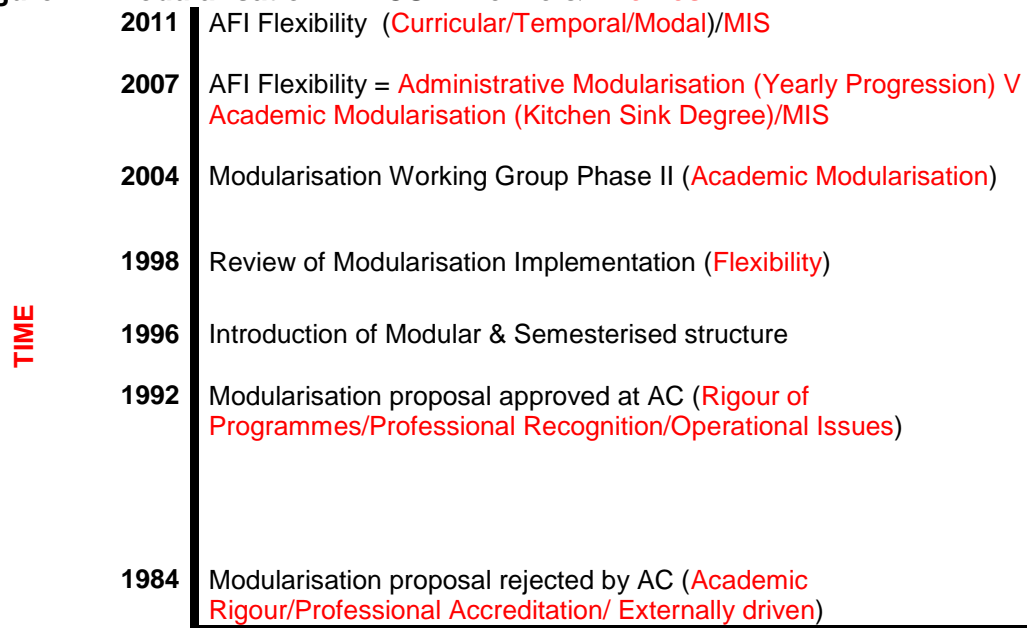
#### **4.4 Case Introduction**

Policy implementation is operationalised in this study as a planned change initiative, referred to institutionally as AFI which was officially approved by the university in 2007. Participants identified internal and external context(s) which brought about AFI. The internal context most identified by participants for AFI was modularisation. The first section provides a construction by the researcher of events and activities relating to modularisation in DCU based informed by participant data but mainly based on the researcher's own analysis of documentary data. The data in this analysis spans from 1984 until 2007. Other internal contexts such as university structures, teaching and learning roles and committees are also presented in this section. The major external context identified unanimously by participants was the Bologna Process itself, the operationalisation of this context by participants was the associated national implementation of Bologna, manifesting in the establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and the alignment of awards to this. Other external contexts are also presented and include the changing service offering of a competitor university to students through their programme of modularisation and the engagement of the University and IOT sector with the development of the NFQ.

#### **4.5 Context of Implementation**

The analysis of the participant data illustrates an overwhelming perception amongst participants at all levels on the implementation staircase that modularisation within the institution led to the development of AFI. The following sections combine participant constructions relating to modularisation and the findings of the analysis of official institutional documentation to inform the researcher's construction of these contexts, see Figure 2. Official AFI documentation identifies explicitly that the AFI proposals were borne out of recommendations of the Working Group on Modularisation, referred to locally as Modularisation Phase II.



**Figure 2 – Modularisation in DCU Timeline & Themes**

DCU became officially modular in 1996, following on from a decision taken by Academic Council (AC) in 1992. Modularisation was previously proposed in 1984 but was not supported by many programme boards (DCU, 1992b). A second attempt to introduce modularisation was approved in 1992. Documentation from this period highlights the following as the main concern documented; a perceived negative effect of modularisation on the academic rigour and professional recognition of DCU programmes as they went from being highly structured to being flexibly constructed or altered in a modularised environment (DCU, 1992a:5-6). A senior academic in his account perceived that modularisation was brought about essentially by external factors and by the university's desire to be at the forefront of changes (UTL14, 2010). The internal force for its introduction, perhaps driven by an external factor was also reported by one member of senior management who felt that the institution wanted to be seen to be progressing state policy, in an effort to enhance the external political treatment of the institution (UTL05, 2010). Modularisation phase I was progressed over four years and was launched in 1996. A modular officer and Information Technologist were appointed from two support units to support the implementation.

School modularisation co-ordinators were appointed at faculty level. Within a documented account of the university's engagement during this period Bradley (1999:134) described the process to transform programmes into a modular structure as safeguarding the academic integrity of the programmes and ensuring the international currency of the university's programmes and awards. The substance of the activities of the implementation process was the structural conversion of each programme into a modularised form i.e. setting the number of modules and associated credits for each semester and year of the programme (DCU, 1995). Participant accounts included a perception of surface level engagement by staff with these activities:

...what they tended to do was they took a yearlong module because everything was structured like that and they just took a sharp scissors and cut it down the middle and said ok that's semester one that's semester two so you saw a whole series of modules becoming language one and language two or economics one or economics two...

(UTL13, 2010)

Following this step, academic staff wrote module specifications and prepared a programme document for each programme detailing aims and objectives, entry requirements, module specifications, assessment procedures and a transferable skills module matrix (DCU, 1995). These steps were designated as validation and accreditation and over 60 programmes of study engaged in this process (ibid:135). Other issues were also engaged with during this implementation, including the writing of new academic regulations and the acquisition of a new management information system (MIS). A working group was established at this time to deal with all aspects of MIS from procurement, requirement analysis to implementation (Bradley, 1999). One participant account describes tensions relating to acquiring and paying for customisable features between central administrative units and academic schools. A perceived outcome of this tension was that programmes were made comply with the inherent structures of the system (UTL17, 2012).

Participant accounts of modularisation reflecting on the outcomes of the process describe in the main the maintenance of the status quo within the university:

...the key word of modularisation was flexibility which is supposed to encompass flexibility for students which it never delivered. We stuck with completely prescribed programmes in essence and flexibility for the university because modularisation was supposed to mean that we could now configure new programmes in a much more flexible way and that wasn't really achieved...

(UTL05, 2010)

In a paper written by the Office of the Dean of Teaching and Learning in respect of modularisation phase I a similar construction of this perception is provided:

A framework" was largely *superimposed* on these programmes. The pain of that process has been significant, yet the hoped for benefits have generally been slow to materialise. These high quality, highly integrated, programmes have been viewed as a hallmark of the DCU educational experience, and a major contributor to our established reputation...

(DCU, 2001)

The scope of what was actually implemented as set out in the original proposal in 1992, was perceived as being inevitable in some accounts due to the level of resistance within the university:

...that not just were there limitations in the way that modularisation had been produced; there was also still a heavy staff resistance to having them at all and a kind of a resentment. The resentment was partly driven by the fact that they believed that they had been bounced into it...in fact the only reason that anybody was ever able to tell me that the reason for the modularising was because DCU wanted to be ahead of others doing it.

(UTL02, 2010)

This resistance was perceived to be quite negative in other accounts:

I do remember very, quite bitter negative debates, comments, attitudes, approaches around that time which were understandable to the extent that as it happened recently a decision on modularisation...

(UTL06, 2010)

The analysis of university documentation, documents further activities relating to modularisation. These included central reviews and the establishment of working

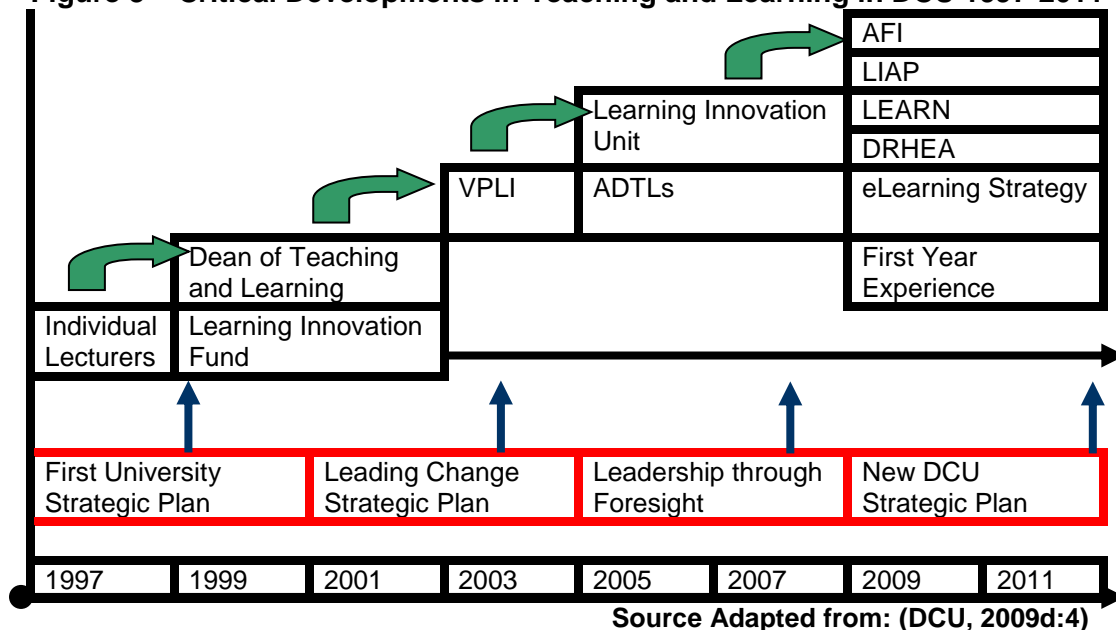
groups to introduce curricular flexibility. In 2004, a working group for modularisation phase II, chaired by the recently appointed Vice President for Innovation/Registrar (VPLI/R), commissioned an external advisor to further the modularisation agenda. A report was produced which differentiated between academic modularisation i.e. curricular flexibility and administrative modularisation. The account of the reaction of the faculties was mainly opposed and unsupportive of the proposals and sceptic of the purported benefits of modularisation (DCU, 2004a , 2004b , 2004c , 2004d). In December 2005, under the Learning Innovation Strategy, it was asserted in university documentation that modularisation phase II would be implemented. This proposal came under the remit of the Vice President Learning Innovation/Registrar (VPLI/R) (DCU, 2005b).

Key performance indicators associated with this objective included, that all undergraduate students would study a minimum of 10 ECTS from modules taken outside of their programme and that the university would aim to establish a generic framework for degree structures to allow students to create individual learning pathways (ibid). These objectives remained in the mid-term review of the plan and were accompanied with a commitment to comply with Bologna developments (DCU, 2007f). Externally within the sector, the largest university in the state launched its own version of modularisation, “Horizons” in September 2005, which allowed undergraduate students to choose electives from a wide variety of discipline areas (IUQB, 2011). In 2006, a final report of the working group on modularisation was presented to the university’s Executive, and minutes of this meeting state that the work of the working group had concluded. The minutes also refer to a proposal to be placed before Executive following input from the Associate Deans for Teaching and Learning/Education (ADTLs) and the Students’ Union (DCU, 2006). The proposal referred to in these minutes was the pre-cursor to the AFI proposals adopted by Academic Council in 2007.

### 4.5.1 Changing Structures

A further internal context, constructed by mainly institutional level participants was the changing structures within the university. An audit of critical developments in teaching and learning from the university's strategic plan illustrates some of these, Figure 3. Further to this, a new faculty based structure for the institution was advocated in 2001.

**Figure 3 – Critical Developments in Teaching and Learning in DCU 1997-2011**



In 1999, DCU appointed a Dean of Teaching & Learning (T&L), for a three year term. This appointment was mooted in a strategy review in 1995 but was also documented to have been made due to the appointment of a Dean of Research (DCU, 1998). A reconstituted university level T&L Committee was established with representations from school convenors. This structure mirrored the structure adopted to promote research within the university (DCU, 1998 , 1999). The post of the new VPLI was advertised in November 2002 and then again in April 2003, but with one significant change. The post had been combined with that of Registrar to become the VPLI/Registrar. In 2003, the term of office of the Registrar came to an end and a decision was taken to amalgamate the VPLI and Registrar roles by senior management. The rationality of this decision was questioned within participant

accounts who perceived that these roles were more in contrast than harmony:

...there was a correct view at the time that there was a tension between the role of Dean of Teaching and Learning and the role of Registrar. Not a tension between the individual people involved but between the roles and the boundaries between them and how they should interact and the possibility in particular of appointing a Vice President in that there could be potential for conflict that it would be better to avoid rather than building in a structure that encourages conflict on which we should actually address that up front.  
(UTL05, 2010)

An external candidate was appointed to the post of VPLI/R on the 01st February 2004. At this time, it was also decided to create a new post and to appoint a Director of Registry, to be responsible for the day-to day management and administration of the Registry. The decision to combine these two roles has been maintained since this time with the post of Registrar being re-assigned to the Deputy President in 2007, when the then VPLI/R term of office as Registrar was completed. By the end of 2005, the university's four faculties appointed ADTL<sup>4</sup>. Their role was described as to include the representation of the faculty at university level, and to advise Deans on academic issues both within the faculty and across the University. In 2005, a Head of the recently established Learning Innovation Unit (LIU) was appointed. Participant accounts document an internal discussion which commenced between the ADTLs in 2005 discussing how to collaborate to advance a wider T&L agenda within the institution:

We may not agree on everything (especially since we represent very different disciplines, but if we are all working towards enhancing learning in DCU, I am convinced we should be able to come to a shared and influential position. I also think we need to take the lead; otherwise we may end up being puppets requested to implement what a very small number of people have decided...  
ADTL (2005)

Participant data describes frequent meetings being held between ADTLs. At this time the executive faculty structure was also taking shape. The ADTLs, Deans and schools were attempting to establish and to develop their own roles and committees

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<sup>4</sup> Also, referred to as Associate Dean for Education in one Faculty

within their respective faculties<sup>5</sup> and in response to changes in structures at university level. Faculty committees were evolving to include Faculty T&L Committees (FTLC), which took on a gateway role for the progression of teaching and learning issues from programmes and schools to higher level university committees. FTLCs also held an advisory role, providing feedback into various university and faculty teaching and learning policies.

#### **4.5.2 External Context**

Participants identified the Bologna Process, as the primary external context for AFI implementation. Within these accounts Bologna is linked to the development of the National Framework for Qualifications (NFQ). Ireland entered the Bologna Process in 1999 with a 2/3 cycle structure already in place, national initiatives and policies at the time reflected some of the key elements and objectives of the Bologna Process (Westerheijden et al 2010). The development of the NFQ was identified as a key initiative to implement many of the Bologna action lines (ibid). The NFQ was established in Ireland by a newly enacted entity known as the National Qualification Authority of Ireland (NQAI) (NQAI, 2001). This step was taken following a consultative process with all stakeholders in education including the universities (NQAI, 2001). The relationship between the universities and the NQAI in the Act required the NQAI:

to establish and promote the maintenance and improvement of the standards of further education and training awards and Higher Education and training awards of the Further Education and Training Awards Council, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, the Dublin Institute of Technology and universities established under section 9 of the Act of 1997;

(Government of Ireland, 1999: 7(b))

However, the NQAI cognisant of the universities' right, as established under previous legislation to set their own standards, clarified in their discussion document that they did not envisage having a "standard-setting or quality assurance review role" in

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<sup>5</sup> This was not the case in DCUBS as its structure had remained relatively stable during the wider structural changes within the university.

respect of the universities (NQAI, 2001: 42). The Act set out explicitly, that all awards at every level of education in Ireland were to be mapped to the new framework and that the universities should “co-operate and give all reasonable assistance to the authority” (Government of Ireland, 1999: 40.1). The response of the universities to the NQAI’s initial discussion document, describes their support for an outcomes approach to the configuration of NFQ levels (CHIU, 2002). In 2003, the NFQ was launched; it included ten levels based on LOs conforming to Adam’s (2007) description of national level descriptors. The learning outcomes, classified as knowledge, know-how & skills, and competence were divided into eight sub strands with learning outcomes associated with each level. The NQAI developed award type descriptors corresponding to each level (NQAI, 2003). Levels eight to ten were associated with universities and their major-awards and included; honours undergraduate degrees, master degrees and finally doctoral degrees (ibid).

Within the university, the Bologna Process or NFQ university level activities is referred to intermittently in university documentation during the period of 2000-2005. In 2002, these activities are reported as the development of a briefing paper and presentation on Bologna to members of AC (DCU, 2002). A further seminar on the Bologna Process was reportedly organised by the then Dean of International Studies in October 2005 (DCU, 2005a). The universities’ umbrella organisation Congress of Heads of Irish Universities (CHIU)<sup>6</sup> established a working group to liaise directly with the NQAI on matters relating to the framework (CHIU, 2004). The university was represented on this working group by a member of staff from the Registry<sup>7</sup>. In 2005, the IUA developed a publication on the NFQ for university staff and students (IUA, 2005b). Engagement with the NQAI by the universities, is reported to have increased as the impact of it on universities became clearer (IUA, 2005a: 22). The implementation of the NFQ was reportedly, well underway within the IOTs as HETAC

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<sup>6</sup> CHIU evolved into the Irish Universities Association (IUA)

<sup>7</sup> An administrative central unit within the university



their awarding body had directed all institutions under its remit to comply with the framework by 2005 (Westerheijden et al 2010). Issues relating to implementation at the upper levels of the framework were identified between the IUA and NQAI in relation to the NFQ in 2006 with the main one being that the framework was too restrictive (NQAI, 2006).

#### **4.5.3 AFI Approval**

AFI proposals were presented to AC on the 25<sup>th</sup> of June 2007 and are documented as receiving unanimous approval from Council, see Appendix 8. Participant data include a variety of constructions to the adoption of the proposals:

It was largely aspirational, it was largely high level and at one level you wouldn't expect it to be otherwise and in fact if academic council weren't happy with that and wanted further clarification it was up to academic council to seek it.

(UTL03, 2010)

Another long-standing member of AC described her perception of the reaction to the framework as being extremely positive particularly in light of the tension surrounding modularisation phase II:

...there was quite a positive reaction I think to be honest, there had been a certain amount of disaffection with the modularisation phase II period because it was felt that there were a lot of meetings and a lot was going on but that there was not necessarily a lot of forward movement whereas when the associate deans drew up the proposals that they drew up, there was a very positive presentation to academic council and council I think with a certain amount of relief adopted and approved what was being proposed...

(UTL06, 2010)

Another member of senior management concurred with this positive perception whilst indicating some wariness at the ability of the institution to deliver on the proposals:

There was a sense which was pervasive through that discussion of the potential excitement of doing something different and evolving it and developing it. That was a big change and I myself suppose experienced an intake of breath at the time because one of the things and this is part of the discussion, if we couldn't properly resource it, we might wonder whether this was going to be do-able or worth... doing...

(UTL02, 2010)

The fact that AC had approved the framework on its first presentation was a significant feat as many other items had not progressed or had taken numerous iterations to be approved at Council. The AFI proposals constituted two main elements. The first of which centred on becoming Bologna/NFQ compliant and the second of which was the introduction of flexibility. Having presented a construction of the internal and external context of implementation, the case now continues to present the findings based on a thematic analysis of participant data to answer the study central research and sub question

**How was the implementation of the Academic Framework of Innovation conducted within Dublin City University?**

- **Within an ideographic model of policy implementation, how is a planned change initiative implemented in practice in a university?**

#### **4.6 Incoherence in Policy Implementation**

Rationalist-purposive accounts of policy implementation depict a linear process, where policy is formulated and implemented based on the notions of policy as staged, consistent and incremental (Trowler, 2008). The findings presented in this section are grouped under the theme of incoherence in policy based on the ideographic view of the policy process. This theme delves into the inherent complexity of the policy environment that facilitates incoherent approaches to policy formulation and implementation. Furthermore, it explores the development and evolution of policy paradoxes, which would not occur if the policy process was a rational linear and coherent process. Incoherence of policy making and implementation explores the dynamics of the policy environment and those engaged in policy formulation. It covers and considers issues such as the issue of evolving power, agendas and influences within the process that come into play as policy is written and re-written. The findings of the implementation of AFI demonstrate that policy formulation and implementation are more complex than reducing the policy process to a step-by-step approach to achieve a particular end.

These findings illustrate that policy texts within AFI were subject to constant revision based on policy moving up and down the policy staircase within the institution. Reference is also made to the influence of sectoral policy making on policy within the institution. Policy implementation constructed from participants' data supports the contention that the policy process was the subject of negotiations, compromise and power (Trowler, 2002:12). The development of the canonical practices and texts developed within AFI are accounted for within participant data as being the result of compromise and negotiation and were the source of political activity amongst various interest groups within the process. The findings illustrate that AFI consisted of and evolved into many projects at the institutional and department contexts, all of which were tied into the same implementation process.

These findings are at odds with a purely rational linear approach, which would advocate that policy is designed and implemented to engage with one problem, this approach is very much in contrast with the following account of AFI:

...that there had been a tendency to sweep everything under the carpet in terms of AFI and we'll look after this, that and the other matter when we look after AFI

(UTL06, 2010)

Further to this under a rational approach to policy implementation, a researcher would expect that those implementing would consistently interpret policy. The findings presented in this section demonstrate that alternative interpretations of various aspects of AFI and policy exist within participant accounts. An ideographic notion of policy accepts that policy is made and remade as it evolves and as it is implemented at various levels on the implementation staircases. This evolution occurs within the context of the complexity of local environments and this notion is central to how policy implementation is viewed as an incoherent process more explained as Pettigrew (1990:270) stated "...by loops than lines". If implementation was rational and coherent the complexity of the local would not impugne on the realisation of policy objectives and would ensure that the same outcome was achieved across the implementation environment. The findings presented in this theme argue against this conceptualisation of the policy process and provide insight into the complexity of implementing policy within and in response to local contexts. The findings presented in this section are described by event waves and where possible distinction is made of accounts of implementation from the levels of the implementation staircase to facilitate the reader's engagement with this text.

#### **4.6.1 Formulating AFI Proposals**

Data from participants identify the finding of a dynamic approach to policy design and implementation, where there were a number of stakeholders from a variety of backgrounds and with various agendas participating in the initial policy encoding process of AFI. The context and political activities associated with implementation constructed in institutional participants' data describe and avert to a significant amount of negotiation and compromise between institutional participants with respect to the formulation of the AFI proposals, see Figure 4 and the ensuing AFI project plan Figure 5. Within the introduction of this chapter the contexts of change were explored including the university's continuing attempts to advance a modularisation agenda within the institution and the development of the NFQ in Ireland.

#### **Figure 4 – AFI Underlying Precepts**

3.1 The DCU portfolio of programme and awards will be compliant with the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

3.2 Flexible learning pathways and programme access will be supported. In particular, annual progression will no longer be a universal requirement.

3.3 Registration for a module will last for one academic year only. Any resit opportunities must take place within this registration period.

3.4 New operations and procedures surrounding the allocation of marks and degree classification will be established:

(i) Module Boards will agree marks;

(ii) Award Boards will validate students' results, monitor and record their progress, and agree award grades.

**Source Adapted from: (DCU, 2007b:2)**

The process of encoding the AFI proposals develops the non-linear process surrounding policy formulation and implementation and demonstrates incoherency within the policy process. Prior to the AFI proposals being approved in Academic Council in 2007, the university's VPLI/R approached the ADTLs to work on modularisation in 2006. Based on the analysis of email communications and notes of

meetings held by ADTLs<sup>8</sup> the data includes wide-ranging discussions on a range of issues such as funding, progression, flexibility etc. The outcomes of these discussions culminated in draft proposals which included from the outset compliance with the NFQ and ultimately, the adoption of a learning outcomes approach. Notes of ADTLs meetings, however, account for a negotiated shift in thinking of the group. A discernible shift in the objectives of the proposal from compliance with Bologna as a means to implement modularisation, to compliance with Bologna as being a first step before anything else could be achieved can be traced. The concept of modularisation evolves within this data from an initial prominent position to one goal amongst many others (ADTL, 2006a , 2006b). The proposals were constructed further within participant interview data as a broad means to advance a number of issues that the university had committed itself to in its strategic plan. Implementing AFI is interpreted as adopting a so called “innovation bundle” with a wide range of objectives as opposed to adopting a fragmented approach to the implementation of these initiatives (ADTL, 2009). The wide-ranging objectives of the plan were set out as follows:

- placing DCU in the forefront of educational thinking
- building upon existing strengths
- enabling interdisciplinarity
- rectifying current anomalies
- fostering flexible approaches to programme development
- widening student choice - both in terms of curriculum and mode of study
- supporting retention

(DCU, 2007b:1)

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<sup>8</sup> The label ADTL is used in this piece to include the ADTLs and one other member of institutional level staff to protect anonymity, therefore all participant data in this section is labelled ADTL

Figure 5 – AFI Project Plan

	Sep-2007	Feb-2008	Aug-2008	Sep-2008	Feb-2009	Aug-2009	Sep-2009	Feb-2010	Aug-2010	Sep-2010	Feb-2011	Aug-2011
<b>Implementation of NFQ for Bologna compliance</b>												
Information and training sessions on NFQ and Learning Outcomes												
Preparation of new Marks and Standards, validation and accreditation templates, etc.												
Re-design of awards, modules and programmes in line with NFQ Learning Outcomes model												
<b>Development of new Academic Framework and piloting</b>												
Setting up of new structures and procedures for Module and Award Boards												
Design, development and testing of integrated Registration/Timetabling/Student Record System (SRS)												
Gaming/simulation of implementation of AFI												
AFI piloting in Faculties (self-selected programmes/awards)												
Review of operation and subsequent revision of procedures, infrastructure, etc.												
<b>Implementation Phase</b>												
All new programmes under AFI												
Full implementation of new structures in integrated SRS ( <i>old and new</i> programmes)												
Full implementation of AFI												

Adapted from: (DCU, 2007b:4)

However, data from AFI participants include reference to the rounds of negotiation between institutional level participants, focusing on the type of modularisation to be supported i.e. academic or administrative<sup>9</sup>. The ADTLs within these accounts describe liaising with a number of key internal institutional level stakeholders, whilst formulating their proposals relating to modularisation. The ADTLs accounts describe a process of negotiation between themselves, to establish what feedback would be fed into the proposals, whilst excluding other feedback, such as the inclusion of a specified amount of flexible/optional credits available on each programme, i.e. academic modularisation (ADTL, 2006c). One ADTL provided the following construction of the interactions between the ADTLs and another institutional participant, highlighting contrasting viewpoints on the notion of flexibility:

Which in X's conception of it, her conception of it rather would have been very different from ours, X was very interested in the notion of a student being able to come in here choose essentially whatever they liked from the menu of modules and we were very against that. And very much in line with what the vast majority of our colleagues would have thought. so in a sense AFI sort of stepped back that possibility, but X wanted that and you know was still pushing for that and wanted a new marks and standards to deliver that. And so they were X objectives and so X, that's all X pushed for and from our point of view things like marks and standards couldn't be rewritten until a number of other fundamental decisions had been made.

(ADTL, 2009)

This account also references another project which morphed under the AFI banner i.e. the writing of a new set of university academic regulations, known locally as Marks and Standard. The context of experience, institutional and personal history provides further insight into how policy is not developed from a purely rational or linear basis and can therefore be described as incoherent. All of the members of the ADTL group<sup>10</sup> had experienced the historical engagement with modularisation in the institution, whereas "X's" context identified in this quote in this section did not. X did

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<sup>9</sup> The concept of modularisation was replaced with the term flexibility as the project evolved the term flexibility is used within this study

<sup>10</sup> Referring to the AFI Group who were in situ during 2006-2007



hold extensive experience of working in institutions where academic modularisation was in place and had a research agenda consistent with such an approach. Accounts within ADTL notes of meetings indicate that the group did not perceive that the proposal for academic modularisation, would be “bought into” by academics on the ground if the university’s current provision of programmes was not catered for (ADTL, 2006c). Further along the implementation cycle the canonical practice of writing learning outcomes was associated with safeguarding against the so-called kitchen sink degree in within some AFI Executive member accounts:

...we wanted you know the flexibility which is built into the principles is hugely important however, it is clouded by a rationality that's imposed by award learning outcomes. And in a sense if you start with award learning outcomes it makes the notion of what we euphemistically refer to as the kitchen sink degree, it makes it impossible. So the very fact of adopting award learning outcomes in a sense meant that you could never have a kitchen sink degree. But you could of course put forward a general studies degree or whatever which would be very open...

(ADTL, 2009)

A top-down approach to implementing Learning Outcomes (LOs) was proposed by AFI Executive i.e. learning outcomes for awards would be written and then outcomes for module, finally modules and programmes would be aligned using an alignment matrix. This approach was in contrast with the bottom-up approach adopted within most other Irish universities. Official accounts of the rationale for this approach assert that the university engaged with this approach; because it aided coherency to start at the programme level; it allowed programme teams to identify duplication, redundancy or omissions of modules and that by engaging initially with Programme Chairs<sup>11</sup> they could provide local level support to module co-

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<sup>11</sup> A programme chairperson in DCU terminology is an academic who is responsible for the day to day academic affairs of a programme. Each academic programme in DCU has an associated programme board (comprised of academic staff, student representatives and ex-officio members). Each programme nominates a programme standing committee to support the work of a programme chairperson in respect of decisions such as the transfer of students into or out of a programme.

ordinators<sup>12</sup> (Hughes and Munro, 2012:29). Some AFI Executive participants accounts rationalise that programme coherency was central to adopting this approach, as other institutions had struggled by starting with modules first. Furthermore, these accounts describe that by adopting this approach it would practically limit the notion of academic modularisation developing (AFIMGT05, 2009). Historical contexts were drawn into construction to justify the top-down approach. These included the context associated with DCU's approach to modularisation phase I, which was devised primarily to maintain the academic coherency of programmes as opposed to introducing academic modularisation (DCU, 1994). Within the official AFI proposal this historical context is also referred to and a latent assurance to the maintenance of current practice is included within the text:

...learning in DCU has been characterised over the last 25 years by denominated programmes with whatever choice there is usually being strongly circumscribed. The aim of the Academic Framework for Innovation is not to impose full modularisation on all DCU Awards

(DCU, 2007b:9)

Adopting the top-down approach can be viewed as being consistent with protecting the status quo for managing programmes, which is indicative of adopting an approach to implementation which is oriented by current practices within the institution. Therefore, the canonical practices put in place in AFI in this instance it is argued, were consistent with the then current practice of programme management. This suggests support for an inherent policy paradox of implementing reform focused on the module being the primary unit but ensuring that the current practice of the programme being central being maintained. With respect to AFI policy though a glaring incoherency of adopting this approach comes to the fore, as maintaining an implementation structure which emphasised the primacy of the programme was

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<sup>12</sup> Each module in the institution is assigned an academic module coordinator who is a permanent/full-time member of academic staff, they need not deliver the actual module in the lecture theatre

potentially contradictory to one of the espoused policy objectives within the AFI proposals which proposed for the implementation of modular boards (DCU, 2007b). Internally, within accounts of ADTLs different experiences and backgrounds are described. Teaching experience within the institution provides context. Those with experience of teaching modules into a wide range of programmes emphasise the objective of adopting a module based system (ADTL, 2011).

#### **4.6.2 *Contradictory Policy Implementation***

Incoherent policy making can lead to policy paradoxes and these can occur both within an implementation process and in concurrent policy implementation in the same environment. Many examples can be drawn from the literature one such relates to funding e-learning and school management policy, where the government in the UK proposals proposed to centrally manage funding to promote e-learning whilst on the other hand advocating local decision taking and making within schools (Mee, 2007). Policy paradoxes are described within the literature as evolving from the competing and the contextually situated nature of policy implementation i.e. that policy does not exist in a vacuum and that a variety of factors/pressures impact on policy at any time during the implementation process. Maintaining a coherent or rational policy from policy formulation and implementation is extremely difficult. AFI implementation provides insight into policy paradoxes within that policy process. Some paradoxes are identified and contextualised by participants. These findings include the identification of forces both internally and externally which led to the perceived shifting within the process of previous policy positions, objectives and implementation practices and in some cases to policy paradoxes. Policy implementation is influenced by a variety of forces which influence policy as it moves up and down the policy staircase. Forces are not always applied in a neat linear, rational or incremental fashion and they are not always directly linked to

specific or individual implementation processes. This can lead to policy paradoxes and implementation gaps across and in between levels on the implementation staircase. The policy objective of flexible learning was an expressed element of the AFI precepts (DCU, 2007b). Accounts of AFI participants at institutional level, however, indicate that the interpretation of the type of flexibility and hence the objective of policy was contested i.e. between academic and administrative modularisation (this would later emerge within the process as curricular and temporal flexibility). The lack of clarity as to which type of flexibility to be achieved is identified within participants accounts as to leading them to interpret various aspects of the AFI innovation bundle in different ways (ADVISOR01, 2009 , 2010 , ADVISOR02, 2010 , AFIMGT01, 2010 , AFIMGT02, 2009 , AFIMGT04, 2009 , 2010 , UTL06, 2010).

Within this case of AFI implementation participant data identified such occurrences; these occurrences were associated with the funding policy and resource grant allocation model of the HEA. As a dominant understanding of flexibility to be supported within the AFI process at institutional level emerged within accounts, the influence of the external funding from higher up the implementation staircase was seen as applying particular pressure on this objective. This pressure was identified as restricting the institution's potential to realise flexibility during implementation (ADVISOR01, 2009). To implement AFI's version of flexibility (in relation to the principle of progression where a reduced or increased number of credits which students could complete each year) a specific and revolutionary change of the funding model of the HEA was identified within participant accounts to be needed. The funding model for undergraduate students would need to change from the completion of 60 credits each year for up to three/four year cycle, to a model which linked funding to actual credits taken over X amount of years to a maximum of 180-240 credits. Within national policy documents it appears that a coherent policy

environment was supported. The Department of Education and Science indicated to the universities that funding would be conditional on the alignment of awards with the NFQ (IUA, 2006). Furthermore, in 2008, the HEA developed a set of strategic goals for the Higher Education sector as part of a proposed process to evaluate the performance and funding of institutions (HEA, 2008a). A shift to a learning outcomes approach was described as a key element for institutions to improve the quality of teaching and learning as part of a performance assessment (ibid) which would provide:

flexibility in provision, offering multiple opportunities for educational progress through mechanisms such as modularisation, part-time study, distance learning, and e-learning thereby bringing reality to the concept of lifelong learning

(HEA, 2008:12)

The funding model, however, did not change in practice during the implementation of AFI in spite of the rhetoric of policy documents. This led to a policy paradox between the institutional and national levels, but also at the national level. AFI proposed a flexible funding model, whilst the national funding model was devised specifically to fund full-time undergraduate students. The influence of this paradox within the institutional context led and necessitated an implementation gap at the institutional level, as the institution could not adopt an approach to flexibility which would reduce or compromise the institution's budget.

This implementation gap was identified as influencing the type of flexibility that AFI could explore by participants:

...we were looking at was this whole idea of flexibility and how that would be funded, bearing in mind how the government funds but then how the government funds is currently under review and they won't give us a definitive answer at the moment and certainly if you were back again listening to well we've have fees from September 12 months again, so you know HEA aren't prepared to commit. At the moment, officially you are funded for your, a four year undergraduate primary degree, that's what you're funded for. If you take five years to do it, by right you should be paying the last year yourself. If you do it in three years you know, there's no clarity and that's why we did ask about horizons, how they manage that in UCD where you can take a minimum of fifty to a maximum of seventy credits per year and it's done on a nod and a wink we were told and I said I'm not developing a policy on a nod and a wink, either I know or I don't know. And that's it, we did develop a number of models and we costed them but that's as far as we can go until I know is the government prepared to fund a student that way

(AFIMGT03, 2010)

A further policy pressure which put pressure on institutional implementation and the notion of flexibility, was the HEA's Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF) process in 2008. Within the theme unanticipated consequences to purposive actions, reference is made to the SIF funding calling which was sought to fund the implementation of AFI. The university sought to acquire a new Management Information System (MIS) which in some participants' accounts at institutional level was pivotal to the implementation of full flexibility<sup>13</sup> (AFIMGT03, 2009 , AFIMGT04, 2009 , AFIMGT05, 2009). Other institutional level accounts avert to the fluid concept of flexibility and the possibility of current systems to support this notion even when the outcome of the SIF MIS funding was confirmed (ADVISOR01, 2011 , ADVISOR02, 2010 , AFIMGT09, 2011). The funding for the MIS component of SIF reportedly did not materialise, although the university had received positive feedback from the national evaluation panel (DCU, 2008a). Accounts from official university documentation document an awareness of the influence that the contingent factors of the absence

<sup>13</sup> Flexibility in this instance incorporates both curricular and temporal flexibility within accounts

of SIF MIS funding and the required change in the HEA funding model (DCU, 2007a) would have on the scale of the reforms being implemented. These findings support policy being made and re-made in response to these external pressures. Policy implementation within the institution was not only responsive to its own institutional environment but also to the contexts and complexities of policy higher up on the implementation staircase. The process of the adoption of the learning outcomes approach can also be considered as supporting a policy paradox with regards to providing increased flexibility within the system for students. One feature of this paradox bore out during the writing of the university's revised Marks and Standards, a sub-project of AFI. Within accounts of AFI Executive members the new version of Marks and Standards that were written were viewed as an interim step to pave the ground for full flexibility.

However, this account also acknowledges that the interim Marks and Standards were closely aligned to Bologna credit considerations. The interpretation of workload associated to credits within the European Credits Transfer System which was adopted within Marks and Standards equalled one credit with twenty-five hours of workload. Using these calculations a maximum number of calculations was set out for an undergraduate student at 75 credits based on the university's calendar. Adopting such a mechanism within the university's standards and regulation further limited the type of flexibility that the university could implement into the future. Even if temporal flexibility became the de-facto meaning of flexibility which emerged or was supported within the process, adopting this approach was in essence practically contradictory to the accounts within both official documentation and interview data of institutional level participants.

Within these accounts they identify concepts of life-long learning, changing student engagement patterns etc. as leading the objectives of AFI to achieve as this formula limited accelerated pathway through degrees:

- fostering flexible approaches to programme development
- widening student choice - both in terms of curriculum and mode of study

(DCU, 2007b:1)

As previously discussed within this theme, this restriction facilitated the current practice with relation to maintain an overarching programmatic paradigm within the system and resisted academic modularisation or the so-called “kitchen sink degree”. The findings presented in this theme of incoherent policy making are indicative of an ideographic notion of policy which rejects linear, incremental and rational views of the policy process. They illustrate at the institutional level the dynamic environment in which policy was encoded and support the notion of policy in motion. AFI policy and its interpretation by participants did not remain static. Participants in their accounts draw on the complexity of the policy process and describe forces from various levels of the implementation staircase which impacted the policy process.

#### **4.7 Unanticipated consequences to purposive actions**

Under this theme of unanticipated consequences to purposive actions the findings indicate that policy implementation is not singularly the outcome of a rational, rigid blue-print. Policy can be thought of as being influenced or comprises based on interactions and activities of various implementers which is influenced by local and personal context (Bleiklie, 2002). Based on this, it is argued here that it is not rational or indeed coherent to consider policy implementation as linear, where the ends of policy and indeed the means by which policy is implemented can be predicted or managed due to the complexity of the policy process and those within



it. This finding develops the notion of an ideographic approach to policy analysis as being based in bounded rationality. The findings presented within this section include accounts of the policy process, which emphasise the contextual complexity of situations beyond the control of implementers. These contexts are not limited to the institutional and within the findings decisions made on the implementation staircase at national level are also drawn on to indicate dynamics of the policy process. The theme of unanticipated consequences to purposive actions of implementation was found to cut across much of the participant data at both levels of the implementation staircase. These findings support an ideographic conception of policy, which advocates that multiple issues and factors affect policy implementation, outcomes and objectives and that policy is not completed in a vacuum.

The theme is closely associated with the theme of contextually contingent outcomes, where local contexts are considered to add to the complexity of implementation. Based on this it is expected that unanticipated consequences to implementation will arise. Findings presented in this section, therefore, include references to the contextually contingent outcomes of the unanticipated consequences of the process of implementing AFI. These are grouped under specific events and events waves. The consequences that are considered in this section are focused on those, which would not have occurred if the actions (inclusive of the more nuanced notion of events and event waves) of implementation had not taken place. The analysis includes the side effects as constructed by participants to these actions. Furthermore, the rationality of the purposive action i.e. was the most objective means to achieve a specific ends is not examined although participant data provide accounts of whether they considered decisions to be considered rational or irrational. The consequences presented in this section include consequences to individual actors, to the implementation process and also

consequences to wider practice. An effort is made, however, within the findings to include context related to the purposive action, which illustrates the complexity and the contextual contingency of policy implementation. The findings of this theme also address similar issues with respect to the coherency of the policy making and implementation. The findings within the section relating to external funding show that implementers may engage with perceived rational actions in the light of specific contexts but these purposive actions in themselves do not necessarily lead to coherent policy implementation.

#### **4.7.1 External Funding**

The purposive actions associated with SIF event wave funded provide accounts which refer to both unanticipated and unintended consequences for participants and for the wider implementation process. These consequences manifested in institutional participant data and are attributed to the delay of implementation of the project and also to the scope and substance of the project. External contexts are also perceived to have influenced the implementation timetable and that the university re-acted to these to guarantee external funding. Participant data from AFI Fellows accounts point to consequences of their perceived early appointment to the project. These accounts include project workload issues and to the re-actions to their roles within their own local contexts by their colleagues. The AFI Fellows accounts can be conceived of as side-effects which would not have occurred only in the context of the implementation, which is consistent within an analysis of unanticipated consequences (Merton, 1936).

The scale and scope of the project, was thought within the university's Budget Committee and Executive to demand significant investment in human resources and infrastructure to fulfil full AFI (DCU, 2007g). The university reportedly, did not have

institutional funds to finance the scope of the project, which included a major MIS initiative to introduce flexibility within the system for students. The Government's SIF II funding was identified as a funding mechanism to deliver AFI. The institution undertook purposive actions to obtain funding in the region of €2.4 million to fund the AFI initiative from that fund (DCU, 2007e). All submissions necessitated inter-institutional collaboration and a number of proposals within the university were developed to ensure that the requirement was met.

AFI when it was proposed was separate to the SIF and when SIF came along we realised that the enhancement of learning would cover what we wanted to do under AFI and it made sense that if we could get the funding to do it well that would all be.

(AFIMGT04, 2009)

This account implies rationality by institutional implementers and senior management in attempting to obtain funds to complete AFI, at that time the university in its own official documentation identified that it could not finance the scope of the project from its own funds (DCU, 2007g). Rationality from this perspective implies taking an option based on the limited circumstances the university found itself within. It does not imply taking the most rational or logical option to guarantee a specific end. The findings in the following sections outline constructions linking this decision with unanticipated consequences within the implementation process. The taking of this decision by the university is indicative of the policy process being responsive to the environment in which it is set. The dynamic of policy implementation is further evident under this event wave. Accounts identify activities of institutional implementers lobbying, negotiating and consulting with senior management in response to this funding. These activities are constructed to have been taken to ensure the centrality of AFI within the university's SIF submission, as other initiatives were also being considered to be included (ADTL, 2009). Unanticipated consequences in participants' accounts strongly

associate the substantial delays to progressing implementation directly with the SIF funding process:

But I think ultimately waiting for it was very frustrating for the first six months, waiting on SIF announcements and stuff like that. Because we literally, there is only so much planning that you can do unless you know if you are going to get funding and the IT infrastructure has been the real killer over the last two years that has been the most frustrating part it really has. Because initially that was not part of the first funding so when the funding announcement came out they would not commit to that and then there was a sort of a second round about that and even last summer you know the Academic Leader was making kind of submissions and presentations to external consultants about it. And then it was really only by Christmas twelve months that we kind of heard no there is no funding there. So he had been a year and a half in limbo...we had been almost a year and a half in limbo before they kind of really pulled the plug on that. And that's a terrible, when that was the keystone of the whole AFI flexibility aspect that was a killer you know.

(AFIMGT04, 2009)

The linking of the funding with the SIF funding also incorporated other innovations within the SIF proposal and the funding received to implement AFI. It also placed an obligation on the university to fulfil these associated projects even though the university had identified AFI as its principal teaching and learning reform. By applying for funding under SIF, the university itself engaged in a policy paradox by adding more elements as part of T&L reform within the institution, which could potentially obscure its focus on realising AFI. Indeed under a later theme, where the findings of AFIs fluid implementation structures are discussed, changes to the structure of AFI implementation structures were related in constructions as a need to complete other SIF projects, see section 4.9.1. The concentration of institutional implementers on the SIF proposal and subsequent engagement with the HEA, was constructed also, to have shifted the focus from the main critical ingredient needed to implement flexibility to achieve full AFI which was an integrated and an updated MIS (AFIMGT05, 2009). In other institutional implementer accounts, the consequence of SIF funding was seen to be positively pivotal to the implementation timeframe:

...if we get SIF funding it will be fast and painful and if we don't get SIF funding it will be slow and painful. That was my description of the AFI process that we were going to pain it, it was not going to be easy. People would feel it and it would be work for a lot of people and challenge lots of people and so on so there was going to be pain and we might get more done with funding but it would take longer without funding...

(AFIMGT01, 2010)

The university was successful in its bid for some of the SIF funding but critically it did not receive funding to acquire the new system which had been so closely associated with flexibility by implementers. The absence of funding for the MIS was documented in official institutional documentation as impinging on the scale of AFI (DCU, 2007a). External contexts beyond the control of the university and indeed the HEA are referred to within these constructions, and they are interpreted to have played a significant role in the air of uncertainty hovering over the SIF funding as Ireland's economic crisis unfolded. These contexts were documented at a number of university senior level committees (DCU, 2008d). In response to this university documentation reports purposive action taken by the university to commit and guarantee the funding that it did receive from SIF. It describes entering into contractual arrangements until 2010, where the university reported to the HEA that the following personnel were appointed to implement the project (DCU, 2008c):

- The backfill of the position of AFI project Leader
- The commitment to buy-out 50% of the ADTL and dedicate it to SIF projects
- The appointment of 25 academic fellows under the AFI Fellowship scheme

The taking of decisions in response to the environment is consistent with the ideographic conception of policy as it demonstrates that policy does not remain static and unaffected by contexts. The rationality of the substance of these decisions is questioned in some implementers accounts presented in later section. The unanticipated consequences for the wider implementation process are also contextualised in relation to this purposive action. Responses to decisions do not

occur only in response to current contexts. They are shaped by historical contexts and are situated within social settings. The wider institutional setting as an academic establishment and AFI viewed as a teaching and learning reform are interpreted in AFI Executive accounts to explain in part for the substance of these decisions e.g. why only academic fellows were appointed. Further to this, historical events associated with the previous implementation of modularisation within accounts are used to further to contextualise and in some instances to situate these purposive actions in.

...If you look back, we could do some comparisons to modularisation and semesterisation, when we did that first time around we appointed what we called a modular officer which was an internal secondment of somebody who understood the processes, the systems and worked with ISS and registry altogether and for the implementation its key but those people need to be there from the very beginning in terms of the planning. So it was something that I thought was important but it didn't materialise...

(ADVISOR02, 2010)

The early appointment of AFI fellows to the process was viewed as an unanticipated consequence and side effect of the linking of the AFI process with the SIF external funding bid. Accounts of unanticipated consequences within AFI Fellow data identified Fellows as being the receiver of these consequences. The timing of the appointment of Fellows and the fact that for the first few months of their appointment they completed training is also averted to as the basis of negative interactions between Fellows and their academic colleagues.

One member of AFI Executive in his construction described this as:

And so like the real issue was the existence of the AFI fellows when they shouldn't have been there. Because that caused frustration and dissension and discussion which would have been better off not taken place at all.  
(AFIMGT05, 2009)

Further accounts of the side-effects for individual participants related to the distribution of workload associated with AFI and the reaction to their role within the first semester of their appointment by colleagues. An example of this was the timing of teaching relief given to some Fellows on the basis of the proposed AFI implementation schedule. AFI Executive established a schedule of training for Fellows focusing mainly on advocating the adoption of a learning outcomes paradigm and the writing of learning outcomes. Some AFI Fellows in their constructions described how they felt they couldn't justify the teaching relief they had received to colleagues. As they interpreted that during the initial stages of the project they had only participated in these training events, which they viewed as having limited activity within the project (ASSOCIATE13, 2009 , ASSOCIATE14, 2009). A further reported consequence of the Fellows early appointment was the use of teaching relief by Fellow. Some Fellows had negotiated to have it applied in the initial stages of the project but required it in the latter period of their appointment when the workload of fellows increased (ASSOCIATE19, 2009). AFI Executive members within their accounts interpret the appointment of Fellows as being too early but interpret this with the need to guarantee the allocation of SIF funding by the HEA (AFIMGT01, 2010 , AFIMGT02, 2009 , AFIMGT05, 2009).

#### ***4.7.2 Acquiring and implementing the Module System***

A myriad of unanticipated consequences were identified from participant data relating to the purposive actions of purchasing and rolling-out the Module system during the process. These consequences manifested in the categorisation based on

the political activities of participants at institutional and departmental levels. The findings presented in this section support ideographic policy analysis which suggests that projects evolve as they are implemented in spite of the notion that implementation rigidly adhere to clear project plans (Trowler, 2008). The outcomes of participants' political activities and actions were also attributed to delays with implementation. They were also linked in interpretations to a perceived policy paradox for individual, departmental academic participants who were encouraged to review their modules and to constructively align assessment with learning outcomes but could not change all module data held in the system. Academic participants within schools could not change structural assessment data held within the Module System, as it was populated from the university's SRS. A policy paradox within AFI Fellows accounts, particularly those who had encouraged colleagues to engage in all aspects of module design/re-design.

The purposive actions of acquiring the Module system was specifically interpreted within constructions for as delaying the implementation schedule and for setting back tasks associated with Programme Learning Outcomes and Module Learning Outcomes at the institutional level (ASSOCIATE02, 2009 , ASSOCIATE19, 2009). Departmental participant data accounts of school meetings where they had nothing to report about AFI due to the delays in implementation:

...we have a X meeting every once a month, AFI was an agenda item on each of those since it started, literally we would be talking about it, and for the first couple of meetings, last year I was saying its coming, it going to happen, we are going to have learning outcomes and I was trying to get people ready for it. I left it off for a couple of months, because I was getting to the point where I was embarrassed to say software still isn't here yet, software still isn't here yet...

(ASSOCIATE14, 2009)



Within these accounts these delays are interpreted in part to explain apathy of academic colleagues with the process and ultimately reluctance to engage:

You can't tell people you are going to be doing this, you are going to be doing this next month, you are going to be doing this next month and then nine months later come out and do it.

(ASSOCIATE19, 2009)

The acquisition of the Module System was based on the purposive actions of AFI Executive following the completion of the Programme Learning Outcomes PLOs within the University. It was not originally envisaged as part of the AFI proposals but emerged following the experience gained during the writing of PLOs. AFI Executive members' accounts rationalise the need for this system, as providing a central repository of the thousands of university modules, which were previously held locally and were in a variety of formats. An ADTL reportedly developed a database within the university's VLE to store the newly written PLOs. The scaling of this solution to engage with the next step in the process was interpreted as being unworkable within accounts. The technological solution was commonly described as not being fit for purpose or scalable for the next stage within the implementation process (AFIMGT02, 2009). Administrative staff data at the institutional level contextualise the delay to implementation and to the integration of the Module System with the purposive actions taken by AFI Executive during the acquisition of this system. An unanticipated consequence of these actions for them was their perceived side-lining from the acquisition process (ADVISOR01, 2009 , ADVISOR02, 2010).

AC minutes in December 2008, report that a system was sourced but funding was needed from the university to acquire it (DCU, 2008a). A further complexity though in the situating of these findings, is that accounts of institutional administrative data construct a concurrent process underway to move to a newer version of the Student Record System (SRS). Funding was also being sought by institutional level administrative participants within the study from the university's Budget Committee<sup>14</sup> which was seen to add to the contextual complexity of acquiring the Module System within these accounts. Implementation dynamics (manifesting in political actives) and other forces at various stages along the implementation staircase are described in participant accounts relating to these events and event waves. These findings support ideographic policy were competing agendas, negotiation and compromise are all indicative of policy in motion:

...but certainly things soured quite a lot ahead of the first budget committee submission and it was rejected. Budget committee just went go away and sort yourselves out and come back to us. And that was because you know X Unit and Y Unit just were stalling so long and we need more time and we need to look at more things. And the AFI group sort of said look it we can't wait and said listen we are just putting in a submission and that wasn't comfortable...

(AFIMGT04, 2009)

Approval for the upgrade of the SRS was reportedly received but administrative units were required to review the potential of the upgraded system to ascertain if the upgraded system could deliver on AFI's full flexibility. Interpretations of AFI executive members relating to the proposals to Budget Committee in respect of the Module System purported to have attempted to isolate the then current requirements of AFI and limit it in terms of NFQ compliance. Within both institutional (DCU, 2008e) and participant data varying interpretations of flexibility increased the contextual complexity and dynamic by which implementation was progressed.

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<sup>14</sup> Budget Committee is responsible for allocating budgets and funding within the university

A further context attributed to the purposive actions of the acquisition of the Module System identified within AFI Executive participant data was that the adoption of a new system would promote changes to academic administrative processes within the university (AFIMGT02, 2009). This account illustrates that AFI included a confluence of issues and agendas by participants many of which were obliquely foregrounded during the initial development of the proposal but which evolved and emerged during the process. This policy objective was referred to in the official AFI proposals, but the means by which was to be achieved was not specified except to indicate that a variety of stakeholders would action this issue (DCU, 2007b). Unanticipated consequences from participant data at institutional and departmental level accounts include the desire to maintain current procedures and the hierarchy of practice relating to academic administration. These consequences were most described for in accounts of the political activities of administrators as the system rolled out and was integrated into other systems and as such was an unanticipated outcome of the process.

These activities can be viewed as being based in an orientation to current practice as opposed to rationally pursuing the objectives of AFI. Adopting an implementation approach that is oriented to the maintenance of current practice is incoherent with rational-purposive policy implementation. Such an account would support the notion that implementers would act in a rational way i.e. if their line manager or senior manager had approved implementation they would actively ensure that implementation was realised. Within the following findings, accounts are provided where both administrative and academic implementers at departmental and institutional level; contextualise an orientation by implementers to engage with implementation from the basis of their current practices and contexts. The following account from a member of AFI Executive develops this construction. Within it she

concludes that administrative staff were reluctant to consider the academic structures process<sup>15</sup> from any other basis than the current status quo:

...helping them to understand better the kind of academic side of programme development which X Unit and Y Unit still don't see. Everything stops when it comes to them, you don't really see the, you know if you talk to X of academic structures, the only thing they're interested in is the spread sheet, how you get to that spread sheet. For them it comes from ISS, sorry from Student Record System I mean, that's where their structures come from. I said no, the structure is from a group of academics putting them together in the first place and revising them, reviewing them, revisiting them every year, that's where it comes from but on the admin side, they're very focused on Student Record System, Student Record System is the bible so that sometimes causes a bit of tension.

(AFIMGT02, 2009)

An interesting feature of these accounts though is that they do not interpret that implementation can build on or from the current practices of administrators. Instead, there is an emphasis in the accounts on the deconstruction of practice and a focus on what is perceived to be "wrong" with how things are currently done. This can be contrasted with an alternative approach to implementation where identifying some strength in current practice and incorporating it into the implementation approach provides a basis by which implementers can be engaged with to implement. Within both institutional and departmental accounts there is an orientation to maintain the current practice. This orientation is contextualised in accounts to these practices being part of wider and interlinked processes within the university.

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<sup>15</sup> That process involved the collation of module and programme structural data from programme boards and the entry of this data in the Student Record System (SRS)

These accounts also include a perceived knowledge gap of institutional AFI implementers of the very same university processes:

I think that was just a bit of a learning exercise for people to understand well if you did that you could be disrupting many of our core processes. So that probably wasn't understood fully in the beginning. Perhaps its not now but from my perspective all I can do is try to protect the integrity of our core processes and if somebody is trying to make a decision that is going to disrupt that or impact negatively on our core processes my opinion will be you can't do that, I know people won't like that but you're not saying it to be difficult, you're saying it to protect the integrity of what we do and that is just a learning exercise for people...

(ADVISOR02, 2011)

The issue of the complexity of realising change is also described in this account. Fundamental to this is the implied notion within the account that implementation can occur independent of current practices i.e. that policy is implemented in a vacuum. This account also provides a construction of how policy is encoded and interpreted by different participants, particularly those street-level bureaucrats on the ground within the institution. The integrity of the academic record as understood and supported by the SRS was provided as a context by administrators at institutional and department levels for restricting functionality within the Module System (ADVISOR02, 2010) and with administrative engagement with the system. The integrity of data within the SRS was interpreted in constructions by administrators as being paramount; one Faculty administrator described it as:

Our priority has to be that the data is correct and accurate in the Student Record System.

(FACULTY01, 2011)

One university level participant account associated her interpretation of policy and interprets its effect on the integrity of current processes and procedures:

...you cannot have a system that's open to 500 or 600 academics that go in and change that information either by accident or design, that's critical to student marks, funding issues, the calculation of fees, all that kind of stuff. The equivalence of that is someone down in the back of beyond putting information into a spread sheet which ultimately can end up updating my bank account. It doesn't work like that.

(AFIMGT09, 2011)

This account illustrates one interpretation of what was perceived to be the consequences of the integration of the Module System with the SRS. This interpretation is situated within the participant's own context where administrators had access to live data and that decisions regarding issues of registration were mediated by academics i.e. academics provided students with support in the selection of modules. This is contrast to AFI Executive accounts where access to information systems is constructed as part of a wider integration of systems agenda which would see academic intervention in decisions reduced (AFIMGT04, 2010). One of the consequences of these issues was the agreed purposive action of AFI Executive to the locking fields within the Module System. This decision was accounted to have been made on foot of negotiations between AFI Executive and Heads of operation units (AFIMGT04, 2009). Academics were not allowed manipulate data that administrators (either Faculty and/or Registry) of the SRS, were currently in charge of. This ensured that the current practice and hierarchy was maintained that academics would not have access or rights to manipulate module structural data which was mediated by administrators at the local (faculty) and central levels. The dynamic of implementation is also contextualised by participants who describe that some of these decisions were based on interpersonal issues between implementers as opposed to technical/data security issues.

This dynamic was interpreted within constructions as the barrier between the progressing of integration issues with the Module System the SRS and other academic processes (AFIMGT02, 2010). Eventually, AFI Executive negotiated to have the assessment field unlocked and the new module functionality activated (DCU, 2009e). AFI Executive academic accounts and administrative accounts of the Module System interpret that an unanticipated consequence of the acquisition of the Module System was that instead of the system becoming part of the core academic administrative processes it was viewed as an add on or silo (AFIMGT06, 2011). When the system was initially rolled out it was maintained outside of the information system structure i.e. it was not integrated with any other university system. Over time within the process a limited integration of the system with other systems occurred is interpreted to have occurred.

A further and fundamental unanticipated consequence for the AFI Executive group derived from institutional participant data associated with the Module System centred on the interpretation of “ownership” of the system. AFI Executive members are interpreted within the institutional administrative data as owning the system as opposed to an administrative unit as was organisational practice i.e. SRS owned by Registry. An administrator within the SIF project provided support for the system but within these accounts ownership of the Module System is linked to AFI Executive and more particularly to the ADTLs. Within AFI Executive accounts a consequence of this is contextualised for a perceived change in the substance and focus of Executive meetings. Meetings were interpreted as being bogged down in technical issues associated with the Module System over a substantial period of time (AFIMGT06, 2011).

The following findings describe the purposive actions taken in one faculty during AFI implementation based on accounts of participants. These actions illustrate the variance in the interpretation of policy objectives by participants and the consequences for participants. Furthermore, they highlight the complexity of introducing change at the local level particularly when there is a perceived lack of ownership by local implementers of the policy objectives and when there is a perception that there is no felt need to change. At the Faculty level purposive actions were taken by one ADTL with the backing of the Faculty Board to change the academic structure's processes within the Faculty. This proposal was based on the linking of an academic process for approving modules which centred on the use of the Module System. FTLC is interpreted within many constructions as taking the role of a module board and furthermore, taking some of the responsibilities away from the programme board structure. Faculty administrators contextualise in their accounts their reluctance to engage with this process as they interpreted it as a new process which was independent of current administrative practice within the wider University and in other Faculties of which they felt obliged to maintain:

We can make recommendations, we can pilot a project but we cannot go out on a limb, we cannot develop an X if that does not exist in every other faculty.

(FACULTY\_TL08, 2011)

Other side effects of this purposive actions in accounts was a perceived confusion caused by the change in process and how this change was perceived to influence the practice of Faculty administrators and academics within the process:

...we just didn't know how to go about putting it in place and getting it from people because it's a different kind of process, its something new for us and we were told we didn't need to worry about it and then in the end we did need to worry about it really.

(FACULTY03, 2011)



Individual unanticipated consequences along with delays to wider processes were also identified in administrators' accounts:

I think it caused confusion when it came to programme boards. Because a lot of the time at those sort of meetings people will look to us for guidance on things and we weren't able to provide it as such so that would certainly make you feel a little bit insecure in that situation and I think it probably prolonged the process as well when it came to amending things and changing things.  
(FACULTY02, 2010)

The findings imply a resistance to engaging with implementation by administrators and an orientation towards current administrative processes, such an approach to implementation is consistent with ideographic notions of policy. An unintended consequence of these actions though was the bypassing of the associated academic quality process which had been set out as part of the implementation process of AFI at the departmental level in favour of maintaining the current status quo. This account from a Faculty Administrator justifies this stance in her construction. She contextualises and interprets her activities on the basis of ensuring that current administrative practice is maintained, as it is a critical element which feeds into a more complex web of procedures and processes for the system and ultimately for students lower down on the implementation staircase:

The bottom line is X Unit are responsible for the systems and they have their schedules and systems have to be set up in order for students to register for the next year and for CAO and all that. That can't be delayed, we had to get that work done because we had up until the end of April or May with the data we had done and whether it was approved or not in a sense was irrelevant because it had to be done and X Unit couldn't do it during the summer because they had to make minor changes up until July and after that people are registering so you can't actually know or have a situation where students can't register because you can't have a university anymore if student's aren't here so it didn't affect us at all in that sense.

(FACULTY02, 2011)

The tension though between the maintenance of existing processes and a move to the amended one was interpreted by another participant from FTLC as being

contextualised with the complexity of achieving the objective held within the AFI proposals of moving to a modular as opposed programme based system (FACULTY\_TL09, 2011). Locally, within schools some AFI Fellows accounted for how the locking of data held in the Module System as creating an internal paradox within AFI policy. Academics were instructed under AFI to engage deeply with their modules to constructively align their assessments with outcomes and to complete this work on the Module System but their access to the system's functionality was interpreted to have been restricted:

I have actually been talking to members of staff, saying that they should deeply look at their own modules, try and express them in terms of what students should be able to do and members of staff have actually done this and said we can't actually assess what students are able to do in a two hour exam at the end of the module, we would like some continual assessment in there. And they can't do it because the field is locked, I brought this to the attention of the vice-president for learning innovation on several occasions and its still nothing has been done. I don't why the field is locked I can't understand it, it seems nonsensical, to be given a set of directives which say, you should deeply look at your learning outcomes, you should assess those learning outcomes and then say you are a hundred end exam you can't actually change that. It is just mad.

(ASSOCIATE11, 2009)

A decision to lock the fields was taken higher up on the implementation staircase and was part of the negotiations to progress the rollout of the Module System. The consequences of the purposive actions taken at the higher level have developed a perceived policy paradox for the Fellow in this account. This account highlights the findings how decisions and actions taken at higher levels on the implementation staircase can affect the perception of policy of implementers on other levels.

#### **4.7.3 Administrative Process versus Teaching and Learning reform**

Perhaps one of the most significant unanticipated consequences of the process interpreted within academic participant accounts, with consequences for the wider implementation, was that the reform was constructed as an administrative or

bureaucratic exercise as opposed to a teaching and learning enhancement within the institution. The analysis of the scale and scope of implementation provide many accounts and interpretation of programme chairs and individual academics and the various activities they completed within the process and their accounts of the same. The events construct that the writing of learning outcomes for both programmes and modules and the following alignment of modules to programmes are specifically identified with the development of this perception from the data. AFI Fellows at school level attributed the emphasis on the canonical practices as set out by the implementation process such as the filling of forms, templates and the associated training with this to have cultivated this perception with implementers at the departmental level:

There is a bit, maybe my school is different I don't know of cynicism of oh here is another box ticking exercise that has to be done.

(ASSOCIATE06, 2009)

An account provided by an AFI fellow who was also a programme chair of her PLO activities interprets a common issue within participant data as there being an overemphasis on the language used to write learning outcomes. Within accounts this was related to training events, to project documentation and to feedback received by implementers engaged with the programme learning outcomes process:

So the first thing I was involved in was the award outcomes earlier on this year and last year, and as far as I could see because the language of that was, I don't know who decided in it, seems to be some civil servant or some administrator somewhere...

(ASSOCIATE03, 2009)

Accounts of AFI Fellows also hold interpret directives relating to the use of specific language in specific ways within training session and in feedback given to staff as being the basis by which this perception developed:

Even people, one colleague walking out of a training session, I think like that you know, because of the: use single sentences, do not use know use this instead, these things didn't go down well.

(ASSOCIATE08, 2009)

Within departmental implementer accounts there is also an interpretation of a perception that the broader tenets or the philosophical underpinnings of the approach were not adequately debated within a university environment, and as such the canonical practices were at odds with that environment. The emphasis on language and the lack of academic debate is accounted for cultivating an administrative based perception of the process amongst academics. Descriptions of further side effects in accounts emanating out of the purposive actions completed during the writing of PLOs were also attributed to perceived subsequent engagement issues with academics with the process. These side effects are indicative and illustrative of how the policy process is not linear and that processes are more complex than just following step by step plans of action. AFI Executive had designed a template for programme chairs to fill to complete programme learning outcomes. After examining the submissions of the programme chairs, AFI Executive constructed a refined template and programme chairs were requested to complete this activity again.

Within AFI Fellow and participant accounts these actions are interpreted to have led to negative side effects of the PLO event waves. AFI Executive members' accounts agree with some criticism of action they took within this process but their accounts interpret this as a rational approach which they associate with policy moving up and

down the implementation staircase (AFIMGT03, 2009). This decision is contextualised also in their accounts to contextualise actions taken by AFI Executive to incorporate a quality assurance step within the process. The submissions of the programme chairs were contextualised as internal feedback. External feedback on these submissions was sought by AFI Executive from stakeholders at higher levels on the implementation staircase i.e. representatives from the NQAI and other interested parties including employers groups and subject experts which eventually led to the creation of the refined template. The consequence of policy moving up and down the implementation staircase was the creation of an institutional text in the form of the PLO template. This ultimately led to the writing of PLOs for every award within the institution. Unanticipated consequences interpreted within AFI Fellow data, however, attribute the actions of the PLO process to later a perceived hesitancy of colleagues to engage with module learning outcomes as they did not trust that they would have to re-engage with the same process again:

...we had to repeat the programme learning outcome process and people are distrustful of the module learning outcome process because of that. A lot of work was put in and they felt as if effort was wasted  
(ASSOCIATE01, 2009)

The process constructed as being an administrative exercise by academics can be contextualised from the situated perspective of the majority of departmental academic participant accounts. In these accounts they describe the filling in of forms or the completion of templates as essentially administrative practices. Although within some accounts the context of providing students with information about modules and programmes in a standardised way is interpreted as an important exercise. A feature of many departmental participants' accounts is the use of the term "tick-box" exercise. Although content analysis was not used within the analysis to quantify the usage of this term amongst participants' data its presence emerges as a significant feature within the categorisation of the scale and scope of

implementation. Within these accounts the reform is contextualised as a bureaucratisation of facets of the teaching and learning process (PTL02, 2010 , PTL03, 2010 , PTL04, 2010 , PTL05, 2010 , PTL12, 2010). The impact though of this reform on situated practice of academics within the classroom/lecture theatre though was not constructed as be significant as it was interpreted that it would have little impact on students' learning and teaching practice i.e. deeper learning processes. Only in one account does a participant identify that he expects his students to confront him for not teaching a specific outcome. Within this account he interprets this future action by students on his experience of students in his discipline area who he perceives to have adopted an instrumental approach to their learning:

...there is something about the whole process that ties you into having to come with certain goods and you end up teaching to the module descriptor...

(PTL12, 2010)

The actuality of practice and the concept of academic freedom were drawn upon by some participants to interpret and contextualise why they viewed the process as an administrative reform:

...and all of a sudden they want people to do things in the same way and within a period of time but people just aren't used to doing that because that's not how things work, you do your own thing so there was no fit, there was a total disconnect in the way things are normally done and the way they wanted to do things in this area...

(PTL03, 2010)

Fellows and programme chairs accounted that the engagement within their own school of the various canonical practices of the process was perceived essentially as an administrative-focused task to be completed as quickly as possible so that they (academics) could get back to the actualities of teaching and researching. This

Fellow's account interprets the instrumental and surface approach to policy implementation with her school:

I suppose at school level my colleagues just wanted me to tell them what to do, they didn't want me to ask well what do you want, do you want a training programme here? Do you want an information session on learning outcomes? They actually wanted me to tell them what they could and couldn't do which led to me saying; ok this list of verbs you can use, you can't do this as an example and they found that much better. Rather than having to go and having to learn everything about the whole AFI process.  
(ASSOCIATE02, 2009)

Within this account the Fellow contextualises and interprets this approach based on the school culture being more attuned to research and it was from this basis that academics wanted to complete the task as quickly as possible and to get back to their research. A programme chair from the same school interpreted in her account that the task will have no bearing on permanency<sup>16</sup>, progression or promotion whilst also attributing the initiative as a senseless bureaucratic process. In spite of this reasoning she still felt compelled to engage with the process even in a limited way:

I did receive some feedback and I made some minor changes because in the end I basically boiler plated it as well. I mean I took the sort of programme descriptor if you like for one programme and I made a few changes and I used it for each of the other programmes basically. You know, they came back to me and said oh you should you need to do x, y and z. So, I changed a few lines here and there and I sent it back to them...No. I mean I was just going along with it at that stage because it was pointless at that stage for me or for individual people I think to you definitely got the feeling that this was a roller coaster that you were on and you just better go along with it.

(PTL04, 2010)

These accounts contextualise the situated nature of policy implementation and demonstrate how policy is encoded and engaged with in different locales and in different contexts. Within other participant accounts Fellows construct programme and school cultures where teaching and learning are foregrounded and where

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<sup>16</sup> Tenure

different approaches and conceptions of the tasks emerged during implementation. In these accounts implementers describe the canonical practices as instruments they used to instigate change within their programmes. In their accounts they contextualise and interpret that the practices provided them with an “unfreezing” opportunity to stop and refocus what they were doing in both their modules and programmes (PTL06, 2011 , PTL09, 2011). Further to these findings academics who did identify with the objectives of the reform in their constructions, provide accounts of using the opportunity to revisit the academic content of their programmes and to complete in-depth reviews.

These consequences although anticipated were part of the espoused objectives of AFI policy texts, as they evolved through the process but they do provide insight into the situational and contextual differences associated with implementation. It is, therefore, argued on foot of these findings that the notion that policy can lead to the same outcome in every implementation environment is optimistic at best. A fundamental unanticipated consequence for the wider process identified from programme chair data was the absence of a perceived or felt need for specific canonical practices related to the reform<sup>17</sup>. This account constructs the situated context of implementation at the level of the individual and how policy implementation is mediated with respect to individual practice.

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<sup>17</sup> The discussion of this finding is further developed in section 4.8.1



In this account the programme chair identifies with one of the espoused aims of AFI but he perceives his practice is already compliant with what is being requested under AFI. In essence he interprets that this process merely made explicit his current practice but he did not change it on foot of implementation:

My understanding of it is it was designed to encourage reflection on how we present our courses and ultimately on how we deliver them and I see in a sense in making some kind of alignment between what we say we're trying to teach people and the assessments that we design to actually prove we've done that, that we have taught them. To be honest though I kind of think we were doing that anyway and at times it turned into a form filling exercise which merely codified existing practice rather than actually changing or transforming a practice.

(PTL02, 2010)

This account also raises the question of the perceived deficit in the dividend of engaging with this new practice. It also prompts the question if integrating implementation with current practices of implementers would promote fuller engagement.

#### **4.7.4 Outcomes Based Approach and Compliance with the NFQ**

Within the follow section an unanticipated outcome of AFI implementation is explored and its significance for the institution within the wider policy environment is presented. This finding demonstrate that as policy navigates its way up and down the implementation staircase that purposive action on the implementation staircase can lead to significant consequences for both policy implementation and the wider institutional context. The AFI proposals and associated official institutional policy texts advocated the adoption of a learning outcomes approach – to ensure that all of the university's programmes would meet Bologna requirements and to comply with the NFQ (DCU, 2007b:3). As part of this process all of the institutions' programmes and constituent modules were to be written and re-defined based on a learning outcomes paradigm and aligned with the requisite Level on the NFQ. In the case of

a university programmes would normally align to Level 8 (Undergraduate), 9 (Masters) or 10 (Doctoral). Based on an account of a departmental participant a critical and unanticipated consequence for the institution is uncovered relating to the institution's autonomy in the accrediting and the awarding degrees of learning bestowed upon it under the Universities Act (Government of Ireland, 1997). As with other programme chairs, this participant took part in the PLO process and his programme was approved by AC as a Level 9 programme. As has been previously outlined in these findings, policy does not occur in a vacuum or stagnate. Concurrently to university's internal AFI PLO process, an ongoing debate is described in the minutes of the IUA Registrar's Group about the aligning of Professional and Higher Diplomas to the NFQ at Level 8. These awards were categorised as postgraduate qualifications by all institutions prior to the establishment of the NFQ. A process to resolve this issue was reportedly negotiated at IUA Registrar Level in concert with the NQAI and with the professional recognition body of this discipline.

This included a review of the learning outcomes of these programmes and their constituent modules by an expert panel. Following this review, it was asserted that the learning outcomes associated with the programme were not of Level 9 standard (PTL12, 2010). The programme was re-designated internally and externally at Level 8 which the programme chairperson participant described as:

...are imposing a Level 8 status on X qualifications and we were designed as a Level 9 programme and they're totally ignoring that and making us an 8...

(PTL12, 2010)

The review panel revoked the national alignment of all similar awards from Level 9 to Level 8. There were unanticipated consequences for both past and present students of this programme within the system as they were completing/or completed

what was designated a postgraduate award by the institution. A material unanticipated consequence for students would be that in their future professional capacity they would now not receive recognition for this higher award in their salary. Pivotal, this construction of the university's award being externally questioned, reviewed and indeed the level overridden<sup>18</sup>, is a critical finding at the institutional and sectoral levels of the purposive actions within the university of adopting and aligning with the NFQ and with Bologna. Furthermore, the accounted outcome questions the independence of the university's accreditation and awarding processes and the direct accountability of these processes now not only internally to the university's AC (as set out in the University Act) but also to external quality assurance bodies. An ideographic view of policy accepts that policy is not implemented in a vacuum. Therefore, a finding such as this is coherent with the notion of the complexity of the policy process. It also demonstrates how the complex environment that situates policy making and remaking as policy moves up and down the implementation staircase.

#### **4.8 Contextually Contingent Outcomes**

The previous theme of unanticipated consequences to purposive actions illustrated the complexity of consider implementation from a purely linear or staged approach. The process of implementation and the actions taken by implementers on various steps of the implementation staircase provided insight into the contexts in which local and institutional policy implementation is situated within. This theme and the theme of unanticipated consequences to purposive actions are inherently connected and the previous section has illustrated the role of context within the policy process. These findings have identified particularly that policy implementation diverges within different locales due to the complexity of implementing policy within different contexts (Trowler, 2002 , 2008). The findings reported in this section provide further

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<sup>18</sup> The university completed this step internally itself on foot of the review of the external panel

insight into this notion as they demonstrate the complexity of planning implementation or ensuring that the same policy objectives are widely achieved. The findings in this theme are related to the events and event waves identified from participant data. The findings presented under this theme suggest that the objective of the writing of learning outcomes may have been accomplished in the broadest sense i.e. outcomes written for each award and most modules within the university based on the university's own documentation. Specific contexts, however, are accounted for influencing the engagement of staff, the timeframe and in some case the outcome of implementation. The findings also suggest that the canonical practices issued to complete the writing and aligning of learning outcomes may have been coherent in certain contexts within the process but not in others.

#### ***4.8.1 Outcome Based Approach***

AFI Fellow data includes accounts of schools where Fellows did not perceive that they had to adopt an advocate role to promote the adoption of a learning outcomes paradigm within their schools. Accounts from such Fellows interpret this within the context of their programmes' and in some cases schools' connection with external professional accreditation bodies. Some of these bodies had adopted an outcomes based paradigm within their own accreditation processes. Writing learning outcomes and completing alignment were interpreted to be consistent with practice in these schools by Fellows (ASSOCIATE05, 2009 , ASSOCIATE18, 2009). The context of the majority of departmental accounts, however, account that the canonical practices of AFI were interpreted to be at odds with the context of practice within the schools. There was also a perception that there was an inherent disciplinary associated context which restricted the application of this practice within other disciplinary based teaching and learning practices.

The purchase of the Module system, as previously outlined in the first theme of these findings, provided a repository to store all module learning outcomes. The functionality of the system allowed for the design of a module description which held wider module data beyond learning outcomes. For some Fellows until this time, a module descriptor was interpreted as providing a skeletal overview of a module, it was also described as being used as part of the once off accreditation process that programmes during their establishment underwent. Within these AFI Fellow accounts module descriptors were interpreted as brief summaries, whilst the in-depth outline of modules etc. were held in other local documents called course outlines. These documents were described as holding core information of a module (week to week topics, reading lists etc.), and were updated regularly and annually by academics (ASSOCIATE01, 2009 , ASSOCIATE13, 2009 , ASSOCIATE14, 2009). A perceived disconnect between the context of practice on the ground and those leading AFI and academics engaged in teaching was also outlined in accounts:

I just thought that this is ridiculous, if they don't know that that document exists we are actually not speaking the same language. I found that very frustrating, I don't know if they, if they fully understood the way we work, when they set out on this and that's something that could of easily been sorted out.

(ASSOCIATE14, 2009)

The espoused objective of the alignment process as a canonical practice was that a review of the alignment would demonstrate any gaps that needed to be filled. Programme boards would identify these and address them accordingly. The alignment matrix was viewed by AFI Executive for as the tool which would support this and it would introduce and formalise programmatic review (AFIMGT04, 2009). This was one of the stated objectives of the original AFI proposals (DCU, 2007b). There was a perception though that there was an inherent disciplinary associated context which restricted the application of this practice within other disciplinary

based teaching and learning practices. The following account illustrates this perception. The programme chair interprets the new canonical practice of alignment, as being specifically devised for technical subjects and that this approach was not consistent with teaching and learning in his disciplinary area (represented by X in the following account):

No, I think the problem is I suspect that this alignment process was thought up by people who were thinking of very technical subjects. So for instance if I need to teach a student how to design and build with structural engineering a new building with welding and x-ray scanning of joints and very precise skills or maybe a medical education where very precise things have got to be swept in, I can see that maybe this has a function but the problem is that in the many parts of the broad areas of X, it simply is a bad fit, its simply trying to box things into tiny categories that just don't fit at all so what it produces in staff is a kind of a cynicism making up, its fiction, its nonsense but we have to do it so we turn it into a bit of a, we try to have a bit of fun with it, we make up stuff. But if you're asking me is this scientifically constructed? I would have to say not at all, its fictional. Especially these alignments, completely fictional and random.

(PTL01, 2010)

Another Programme Chair from the same school, however, interpreted resistance to the process as being based around the context of the culture of the school (PTL07, 2010). Programme chairs from other schools within the same Faculty also provided accounts of the process being at odds with practice within their own locales:

...it leaves very little space I think for you know innovation or just different ways of doing things you know. And then that kind of template format and this box ticking runs the whole way through so right from people's individual learning outcomes from their modules all the way up to this whole issue of these matrices and...That made no sense to me whatsoever in an academic setting. I don't think it is possible to box in all this stuff. You know to tick boxes and to somehow represent you know either individual modules or indeed whole programmes.

(PTL04, 2010)

Other departmental participants' accounts include resource contexts to account for how "gap analysis" or the composition of programmes is decided:

If you went up and down the corridors here most people wouldn't have a notion, they were asked to do something and they just filled it out and that was it and they don't care and the idea was that the process should be used as an opportunity for the programme team to reflect on how things, nobody's interested in doing that, nobody cares and I can't say really that it affected, our structures next year are based on whether we'll have people to teach certain things and how many modules people are going to teach and AFI is a distant, distant part of that. It's not going to feed into it at all.

(PTL03, 2010)

Complexity is not only associated with internal contexts, external contexts were also viewed within accounts to view the implementation environment. This member of FTLC accounts references both an external context and an internal one which influenced implementation:

...the people that own the programmes or who teach the programmes, they're acutely aware of the short comings in programmes, there's nothing that can be done about these short comings and in an environment where salaries are being reduced, where staffing is being reduced, where communication in certain schools is diabolical, absolutely diabolical...

(FACULTY\_TL04, 2010)

A further finding relating to the context of the practice of teaching and learning though was interpreted to account to how the canonical practice of writing learning outcomes and the process of module approval developed within the Faculty was at odds with teaching and learning practice for some academics:

And then there is also a thing where you know if I had a eureka moment and I wanted to go down to students and talk to them about it, and share it with them strictly speaking I can't really do that for twelve months until I put the module descriptor through the Module System process and get it approved at all the different levels along the way you know. Like if something comes up today even though we are eight weeks before the beginning of the next semester, we can't incorporate it into the teaching and learning structures for next year formally because the deadlines have passed. But there's kind of a feeling of that this system impinging on the natural process of teaching and learning that I kind of suppose partly fundamentally believes in...

(FACULTY\_TL03, 2010)

Another finding though questioned the capacity of the policy texts i.e. the module templates etc. to capture, codify and reduce the complexity of teaching and learning activities into a template form (PTL02, 2010 , PTL03, 2010 , PTL04, 2010 , PTL05, 2010 , PTL08, 2009).

...it was very frustrating; it's very boring and senseless in lots of ways it seems when you're doing it, ticking boxes...I just started ticking and at a certain point I just went look, every X module should give the same so I just started mechanically okay there's 3 ticks there so I have 3 ticks on the next one so doing it that way and by not taking it tremendously seriously, I got it done relatively quickly...So I was going well this makes it kind of meaningless because unless people are doing it with a specific focus, people have totally different interpretations of what this means, of what they're contributing and so on...I viewed it as a box ticking exercise that needed to get done and get off my desk.

(PTL03, 2010)

Indeed, many academic participants at departmental level within their accounts include disciplinary contexts and reference points, to interpret why the canonical practices as set out within the process, were not suitable to codify their teaching and learning practices.

#### **4.8.2 The Module System**

The findings presented under the theme of unanticipated outcomes to purposive actions considered local contexts and the complexities of implementation associated to the acquisition and rollout of the Module System. Furthermore, the findings focused on where the complexity of implementation within specific locales was interpreted with respect to the canonical practices as set out as part of implementation. This section centres on the context of practices that were implemented with respect to the Module System as part of implementation. The acquisition and rollout of the Module System is an event and event wave which was interpreted as initiating a number of political activities within the process by various stakeholders at the institutional level. This section focuses on findings from



departmental level participants and the context of their engagement with canonical practices associated with the use of the Module System. Academic staff in the summer of 2009, were requested to write LOs for the 2010/11 academic year instead of the following one 2009/2010. Some schools and programmes, however, wrote descriptors on the basis of 2009/10 (ASSOCIATE05, 2009). A module approval functionality was a feature of the system. AFI Executive reportedly, committed to review and go through the system's approval process in late summer of 2009. After the initial population of descriptors updating and changing module descriptors was tied in with the administrative Academic Structures process, which was normally completed at the Spring programme boards (which usually fell in late February and March). Accounts from departmental participants illustrate a confusion in relation to their interpretation of the specifics of implementation i.e. who was to approve what as the process for approving a module was shifted away from the programme board to FTLC. In essence FTLC was interpreted within accounts to have assumed an overarching role in the approval and review mechanism or module board although this was not clear to all members. A member of FTLC relays her own confusion in the following account:

I went to a new meeting so suddenly we're reviewing other peoples modules, we were critically evaluating proposals for new modules, we were looking at the wording of learning outcomes, we were also doing things like looking at peoples applications for what's the word.....doing a specific module because they had already done something likewise and so on. And the role of the FTLC just seemed really unclear to me I have to say and the whole thing was learning as you went along what we were supposed to be doing but I really did feel like the rules of procedure were changing every single time we meet.

(FACULTY\_TL02, 2010)

A further complexity relating to this change in practice relates to the situated context by which such processes occur and more particularly how peer-review is conducted within academia. Programme chair participants accounts question the basis of the

practice of review by FTLC, focusing particularly on the disciplinary basis of modules and the prior practice of review within disciplinary setting i.e. at programme or school levels. Even the formal process of accreditation within the institutions would be based on external and internal disciplinary expertise. In the absence of disciplinary knowledge the previous account by the member of FTLC interprets the focus of review on the language or “wording of learning outcomes”. Programme chairs constructed that FTLC would take such an approach in lieu of disciplinary expertise in the committee:

I don't see the point in sending modules up to FTLC unless they're coherent at some level. The question I have is the status or the academic knowledge of the person making that decision, do you know what I mean. I couldn't assess your modules. I presume a lot of them are in Irish anyway for the programmes you run. I don't have the expertise to do that because I don't have the subject matter but then it's really interesting because what they're looking for is commonality of language. Is the language right in terms of learning outcomes...I'm not so sure it's as simply as write all your learning outcomes in the following fashion with this type of language

(PTL05, 2010)

On foot of this practice an inherent policy paradox within the process emerged. The canonical practice endorsed that a committee outside of the programme board reviewed modules for programmes. This was interpreted to have been completed in the absence of specific knowledge as to the alignment between the modules outcomes and the programme or programmes upon which they were to be delivered. It can be argued from this standpoint that the policy objective of constructive alignment between modules and programme was potentially compromised. As the review of the committee took place independently of the programme board without the requisite disciplinary or programme experts in situ. Furthermore, it was interpreted that the focus of analysis within FTLC was mainly on the structural elements of a module as opposed to the disciplinary substance and wider programmatic issues in the absence of subject experts. Modules were reviewed at FTLC but without them necessarily being essentially considered in the

overall terms of the programme structure or alignment of same. This practice was altered during the revisions to the alignment processes where Programme Chairs were asked to complete an alignment for every module on their programme with the overarching programme outcomes.

#### **4.9 Fluid Implementation Structures**

The following theme explores fluid implementation structures associated with the AFI policy process. Rational policy implementation assumes that tight central control will effectively keep an implementation plan on course. These findings do not advocate against the creation of bespoke implementation structures to steer implementation. They do, however, demonstrate that implementation structures are fluid in themselves. This fluidity is characteristic of the dynamic of the implementation process, the context(s) and complexity of implementation and is responsive to the environment of implementation. The findings from AFI indicate that although a central implementation group was established the environment in which they were set affected the implementation structures. The dynamic implementation structures of AFI are also presented as part of these findings. Some AFI structures were also contested during the process. As AFI evolved and projects developed out of it a wide breadth of stakeholders were drawn into implementation. Furthermore, the finding relating to the interpretation of the sense of ownership of implementers is explored in accounts under this theme.

Ownership (or lack thereof) for the project was contextualised in accounts with membership of formal implementation structures. This is particularly highlighted in relation to a perception of exclusion from implementation structures and of a lack of consultation by AFI Executive by some institutional level participants. Further to this at the departmental level the findings illustrate how AFI Fellows adapted their

implementation strategy of canonical practices of implementation with reference to the context of their own locales. The findings presented within this theme are also integrally connected and reflective of the themes of unanticipated consequences to purposive actions and contextually contingent outcomes. The implementation structures of AFI were subject to environmental nuances and contexts with an orientation by implementers to maintain current practices. The findings demonstrate how policy and implementation structures were adapted and remade by implementers to reflect the complexity of implementation and in response to local and external contexts.

#### ***4.9.1 Implementation Structures at Institutional Level & Diffused Responsibility***

A significant feature of the implementation of AFI is the theme of the fluidity and complex nature of the implementation structures at institutional level. AFI was approved and held documented official central support facilitated by senior management within the institution throughout academic and executive committees. AFI had been signed off as a central university initiative with its implementation devolved in October 2007 to an Academic Leader, appointed for a three year term. The Leader appointed was one of the original ADTLs who had been involved with the process of encoding the original AFI proposals. The Leader reported directly to the VPLI/R. The VPLI/R in turn reported on AFI directly to senior university management committees. The academic leader's position in itself did not hold any line management authority<sup>19</sup>. It was documented within university documentation that the implementation of AFI though would traverse academic, administrative and infrastructural areas within the university and this is evidenced in the application made to budget committee in June 2007 (DCU, 2007g).

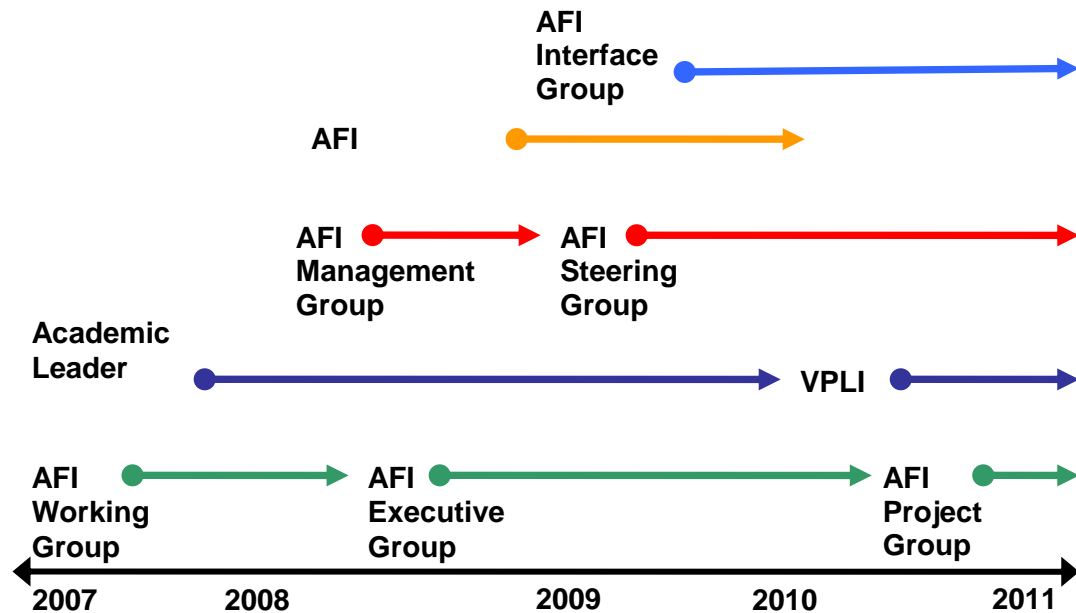
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<sup>19</sup> Line management in the institution is devolved around a pyramid structure with academics/administrators in Schools reporting to Heads of Schools who in turn reported to the Dean of the Faculty who reported to the President. A similar structure was put in place for administrators within support units.

Following on from the adoption of the AFI proposals by AC in June 2007, the ADTLs continued to work closely from the outset with the Academic Leader of AFI. AFI implementation was funded in part through the SIF II allocation that came through in 2008 with matching funding provided by the university. This budget was administered by the Director of SIF and the SIF board.

In 2008, the Academic Leader and ADTLs were part of an informally titled, AFI Working Group but later in 2008 the group evolved to include the Head (and subsequently Acting Head) of LIU to form a core working group known as AFI Executive. Of the four original ADTLs two remained in September 2008 with two new ADTLs appointed. The SIF II application, officially committed half the time of the four ADTLs and that of the Academic Leader to the furthering of SIF projects (DCU, 2007e). The Head of LIU was seconded to the post as the Director of SIF, and an Acting Head was appointed in the summer of 2008. These findings are derived from much of the political activity accounted for in participant data. Figure 6, provides a schemata of the AFI management and implementation structures, as they evolved over the lifecycle of the project based on project documentation.

Figure 6 – AFI Structures 2007- 2011



Implementers not represented within this figure are the final street level bureaucrats of implementation i.e. Faculty administrators who acted as programme board secretaries or FTLC secretaries, and academic staff such as Heads of Schools, programme chairs and module co-ordinators with whom responsibility for different elements of events and event waves is noted in participant and in institutional accounts. As associated events and event waves evolved within the process, the role and the composition of the central implementation group was contested within constructions of administrative institutional participants. The composition of the group did eventually evolve, morphed and merged to include a wider membership base which included administrative stakeholders. In spite of this evolution a sense of ownership relating to the implementation did not manifest in the data of those institutional administrative participants who became involved in this group.

A strong sense of ownership remains by those who had engaged with the project over a number of years even in the context of the changing implementation structure:

...that committee then became defunct and then it was overtaken by another working group or planning group or something and then that just became a talking shop. Nothing ever got done, things weren't tabled correctly, there'd be no documents with it, there would just be a line and an agenda. People would just sit around talking, nothing got done. I got very frustrated before Christmas, I said this isn't doing anything; I think we should go back to our own little committee and just work away in the background...

(AFIMGT04, 2011)

At the departmental level the ADTL were interpreted as being the focal point of implementation within official and participant accounts, whilst within schools AFI Fellows were appointed within the structures to complete the following functions:

**Figure 7 – Summary of AFI Fellow Role & Responsibilities**

- Participate in any training necessary for the achievement of AFI goals
- Provide mentoring, advice and feedback to colleagues in the production of award and module descriptors
- Work with the Faculty Associate Dean for Teaching and Learning and other faculty Fellows to help implement AFI reforms at school and faculty levels
- Participate in Fellowship teams across the University to address common issues
- On-going monitoring of School progress against set targets
- Interim and final evaluation of relevant curricular activity.

**Source adapted from: (DCU, 2008b)**

Ultimately, though the implementation of AFI included most if not all of the institution's full-time academic population. They were identified in project documentation, as the designated implementers of the canonical practices. Their role as set out in the process was to facilitate the adoption of a learning outcomes paradigm for modules and programmes and the constructive alignment of the same. A notable finding of this study is the complex web of implementation structures which emerged evolved during the implementation process in response to the environment in which implementation was set and also in response to the emerging

complexity of implementation within the institution. The network of implementation structures initially formed during the uncertainty surrounding the SIF funding, see section 4.7.1. Within institutional documents the draft implementation structures for AFI in November and December 2007 refer to a high-level steering group, described as a structure which would provide oversight of the work of sub-project teams, led by a designated project co-ordinator (DCU, 2007c , 2007d). The sub-projects included, learning outcomes, marks and standards, information systems, funding model and pilot programmes each of these projects was to include representatives from the ADTLs, support Units (Registry, LIU, Finance, ISS, Office of the Registrar) and representatives from Faculty administration and academic representation from FTLC and/ or AFI Fellows. Within administrative institutional accounts there is a strong and repeated interpretation that these sub-groups did not really manifest in a meaningful way, and that their agendas morphed under the predominantly academic AFI Executive structure:

...it was very important and necessary to have the significant amount of academic input I think the administrative point of view wasn't taken on board or taken as seriously as I think it should have been at the outset in terms of the issues that were going to arise subsequently.

(ADVISOR01, 2010)

As the complexity of implementation unfolded, and other projects evolved during the implementation such as the re-writing of Marks and Standards and the acquisition of the Module System, the composition and capacity of the AFI Executive to steer and engage with implementation is questioned in some constructions. The interpretation of this within these accounts is linked to a perceived absence of representation of personnel from operational units and other administrative entities within the university on AFI Executive and their description of ad hoc involvement with the project through AFI Steering group. Reflecting on the interaction and consultation between stakeholders and the AFI Executive, one head of unit perceived that her



unit should have a continual presence on AFI Executive as opposed to being called into answer questions or to give post hoc advice to decisions already made by AFI Executive (ADVISOR02, 2010):

I suppose when maybe the Director of ISS, the Director of Registry were being involved with these discussions, almost the decision had been made that we're seeing something that's great and it is great but there could be something else that you might be able to do that might be cheaper, that might be more effective, that will do what you need it to do at the moment and then develop it or whatever so...the first conversation I would have would be with X and say okay what way do you think we should do this before I would make the decision as to how we were going to do it.

(ADVISOR02, 2010)

This interpretation is repeated in accounts taken at various time periods during implementation and are contextualised with reference to purposive actions taken by AFI Executive. These include event and event waves associated with the acquisition and integration of the Module System and later on in relation to the proposed changes to academic structures. These accounts illustrate a perception of a perceived exclusion and absence of engagement with administrative stakeholders by the AFI Executive:

...suddenly it became just the associate deans so the four associate deans were basically meeting about everything...this wasn't working and there were real problems in communications, decisions being made without people who had to implement them being involved etc...

(AFIMGT09, 2010)

The breadth of changes to canonical practice, which AFI Executive was attempting to implement, was interpreted by institutional participants to transcend into academic administration and the functionality of operational units within the university.

Within these accounts it was interpreted as essential to have stakeholders involved in the policy encoding and implementation process particularly if the AFI Executive wanted to impart a sense of ownership:

...I did say really, if you are thinking along those lines you really need to start talking to the people who are going to be doing this in a different way than you wish to so that was the establishment of a new group but it still had the AFI executive and faculty people sitting around a table again which seemed quite high level but the drive for the change is coming from the executive group and I just think it was important that they needed to communicate that to the people, that this was going to impact on.

(ADVISOR02, 2010)

Institutional administrative accounts also include perceptions that AFI essentially revolved around the ADTLs and Academic Leader because they had their time bought out to contribute to the project, whereas personnel within administrative units did not (ADVISOR02, 2010). The purposive action of assigning funding from SIF contracts to fund only academic AFI Fellows was provided as the context to evidence this i.e. that mainly academics had been funded and not administrative units. A resulting unanticipated consequence for the wider implementation process was that administrative staff interpreted AFI as an academic project only, but noted that it held significant upheaval for current administrative processes as previously outlined. Most significantly though within the data is the finding that AFI was interpreted as an add-on by institutional administrative staff. There is an inherent construction of a lack of ownership of the AFI implementation within administrative participants' accounts both at institutional and departmental levels. This manifested itself as a perception that administrators were engaging with AFI on top of their normal workload. It was also contextualised that AFI was mainly an academic project led and funded for academics. A further detachment from the process was contextualised by a perceived lack of consultation (FACULTY01, 2011). Another finding relating to the inclusion of different stakeholders within AFI Executive is a perceived disjuncture and separation between policy formulation and policy

implementation. One member of AFI Executive's account interpreted the lack of administrative engagement in the initial stages asserting that the project was centred at the start on academic issues of Bologna and NFQ compliance which in his view did not necessitate administrative involvement until the mainstreaming of these initiatives started to take place:

I think whether there was a need for support for overall management, encompassing the systems and analysts that weren't neglected but that weren't of such obvious importance in the first couple of years, I think you could make a case to say that possible a more global view of the project could have anticipated some of the difficulties around The Module System and maybe gotten over them but I think that you could equally argue that the project needs, now they are becoming significantly more important because for the project to go ahead the involvement of the registry and ISS and faculty admin so its now kicking into those and connecting with those in a much stronger way so its at this point that that would be needed...

(AFIMGT01, 2010)

At the time of the political activities around the acquisition and rollout of the Module System, a common construction held within the data from the Executive group was that the establishment of the AFI Steering group was necessary to move the project forward. This was contextualised with respect to the SIF II funding being stalled and that it now was likely that the funding for a new MIS would be unavailable (AFIMGT04, 2012). Within the process participants described a number of attempts to formalise roles and set out responsibilities. After one year of implementation, in March 2009, the first meeting of the AFI Steering committee was held<sup>20</sup>. The minutes of the meeting record that the day to day implementation of the project was allocated to the AFI Executive sub-group (DCU, 2009a). In spite of this, there remained a prevailing interpretation within institutional accounts that AFI Executive had never formally been constituted or agreed. Within these accounts AFI Executive was still interpreted as an ad hoc structure, which had evolved and overridden the

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<sup>20</sup> A meeting of the AFI Management Group was held in November 2008 which in essence and membership was similar to that of the newly constituted AFI Steering Group. The minutes of the November meeting were formally approved at the March meeting of the Steering Group.

implementation structures developed in 2007 i.e. sub-projects etc. (AFIMGT09, 2010). These accounts questioned the breadth of membership and the overall remit of the AFI Executive group. All of these accounts endorsed a position that the wider the AFI Executive to include representation from other functional areas within the university (such as Faculty administration, Registry and ISS) (ADVISOR01, 2009 , ADVISOR02, 2010 , FACULTY01, 2011). Indeed, even within some AFI Executive participants' accounts a similar perception held, this was interpreted as the group was dealing with implementation and operation issues which crossed significantly into other areas within the institution and those with responsibility for those areas should be included within the Executive:

I did mention earlier that the executive group membership does need to be revisited now and it would have benefited from doing that probably about a year ago. The time The Module System came up there was a very extreme urgency about it at the time and probably that was the point we should have recognised that there was a need for significant step changing, what we've been doing so far to what we'll be doing in the future.

(AFIMGT01, 2010)

A perceived frustration with internal consultation processes, and the slowness by which decisions within the university was used to interpret the purposive actions of the Executive. This perception was used to situate the implementation approach taken by AFI Executive and to progress implementation:

The consultation about any of the stuff that comes out of this takes ages. If you go with an idea, if you don't have a proposal, especially in here, everyone likes to have an opinion then people will just either not engage in it or will just waffle on and on and on so you're much better going with a proposal and saying look this is what we think should be the model, or the set of models and then ask people to either rip them apart or support them or do whatever but people are much more focused if you come at them and say look if you don't give your feedback on it now then you'll be stuck with it and don't complain about it afterwards kind of thing.

(AFIMGT04, 2010)

Competing histories exist within accounts of members of the AFI Executive in respect of their interaction with wider university stakeholders. They range from

interpretations that interactions with other stakeholders were as they should have been, to interpretations that there were fundamental tension between academic and administrative perspectives, to constructions that perhaps these stakeholders should have been more involved in the planning phase prior to decisions being reached or actions initiated. These views oscillate, dependent on time period but remain constant amongst AFI Executive and demonstrate the dynamic and complex environment within the institution that AFI implementation was situated within. Central administrative stakeholders also interpret and relate partially the basis for some of the political activities and interactions to the absence of a dedicated administrative resource in their support units (outside of the LIU) to engage with AFI on an on-going basis. The accounts of the AFI Executive illustrate the dynamics of policy formulation, implementation and design. Within AFI Executive a variety of relationships, views and agendas are apparent within accounts. The approach by AFI Executive structures in themselves reveal a fluidity of decision making and implementation approaches. Some participants interpreted the internal functioning of AFI Executive group as adopting an approach to decision making within the group based on negotiated and consensus between members. Decision-making was perceived to be made after open-debate and agreement on a course of action (AFIMGT03, 2009).

Other AFI Executive interpretations contrast with this and reveal a perception of an influence of inner network within the decision making process suggesting that the discussions made by another policy regime comprising of mainly academics influenced the outcomes and process of decision-making within the AFI Executive:

So there might be meeting about AFI but it's taking place in the second hour where the associate deans have already been meeting about something else and sometimes a decision about AFI would have been discussed and made before the AFI team are actually all in place or the other people in relation to AFI will join that group and the previous discussion is still taking place so there's an awful lot for me of a lack of kind of ring fencing of the different aspects...

(ibid)

In late 2009, a specific terms of reference is reported within the minutes of AFI Executive and standing operating procedures were developed to establish decision-making processes (DCU, 2009b). The structure of internal AFI Executive meetings is interpreted in these accounts to be formed around a working group culture where policy texts would be actively engaged with. Data from agendas and minutes of these meetings describe and record an action-based approach. This culture, however, is described in accounts to have been replaced in the latter stages of implementation. This is contextualised to a perceived change in the role of the ADTLs, which was interpreted to have been curtailed within the process and the implementation structure changed (AFIMGT06, 2011). From both institutional documentation and participant data the evolving and dynamic influence and change of actors and relationships within the policy process is constructed. Implementation structures did not remain static and the contexts of these changes are seen to have unanticipated consequences for the wider implementation process but also for individual implementers as they evolve. Within institutional participants' accounts a number of changes to senior management occurred in 2009, such as the end of term of the post of VPLI and the appointment of new VPLI. These events are seen as contextualising events for the changing AFI implementation structures within both

administrative and academic institutional participant accounts. In the spring of 2010, the Academic Leader stepped down from his role and the then VPLI was given responsibility by senior management to continue to progress the project. The transferring of responsibility for the project to the VPLI was interpreted as a context by which the implementation and committee structures changed within the project by AFI Executive participants. Project reports document that changes to implementation structures were actively being contemplated at this time. An official decision was made in September 2010, to expand the composition of the AFI Executive into an AFI Project Group which would include representation from the Faculty Managers, the Director of Registry and the Director of ISS (DCU, 2010a).

Within the context of the project many political interactions are accounted for in AFI Executive and administrative participants' accounts with respect to the Module System. These interactions are viewed to have led to the evolution of another structure known as the AFI Interface Group so that Faculty administrators would have a gateway into the project (DCU, 2009c). There was also a reported move to engage with the wider AFI project, beyond NFQ and Bologna compliance and at the September 2010 meeting it was minuted reported that "curriculum reform and innovation should be part of normal, on-going academic work" (DCU, 2010a:1). A revisioning exercise in November 2010 was planned to explore the question of flexibility associated with the wider AFI Project (DCU, 2010b) and a further meeting was scheduled for January 2011, when the new President would present his vision for AFI. Prior to this, at the September meeting the chairing of AFI meetings was reported to have developed to the Director of SIF in the Autumn of 2010 (DCU, 2010a).

The interpretation of these changes were viewed by AFI Executive members as setting into train a period of increased tension as it was considered that the structure and working style of the former AFI Executive was altered. One former member of AFI Executive perspective on this change was:

...the AFI Executive which used to meet every second week for about 2 hours and we used to do things, draft documents, or half draft them or the heads of them and instead they became meetings about meetings, about what we might do and not actually doing anything. So it ceased to be to some extent owned by the AD's and its other issues got confused with it, problems with the Module System which are really technical kinds of things and we spent some terribly frustrating meetings...

(AFIMGT06, 2011)

The role and influence of the ADTLs altered in early 2011 in the project. A decision was taken and communicated to the ADTLs not to continue to part-fund their AFI role beyond the original end-date, i.e. December 2010 with SIF funds. The rationale given for this decision was that the substantial pedagogic elements of AFI had been completed and mainstreamed (DCU, 2011c). It was also stated that the remaining SIF funds were required to support the other collaborative projects linked in the Dublin Region Higher Education Alliance (DRHEA) and also that the focus of the AFI allocation funds needed to be prioritised in relation to DCU's MIS (ibid). ADTLs accounts of this period include constructions of political activities undertaken by them in relation to the decision. This was described as having culminated with the issue being raised at Senior Management (ADTL, 2010). There is a perception within ADTL accounts that the actions taken at the time were taken to reduce their influence in the dynamic of the process:

...without being too Machiavellian about it, I think it clearly was an attempt to reduce the power of the AD's in this and I don't know whether the AD's have too much power in this, I'm sort of agnostic about that but the net effect of bringing more people with different agendas in it was to ensure that it would slow down and stagnate in my view.

(ADTL, 2011)



Accounts of participants also interpret an increased involvement of central university i.e. a perception that senior management stakeholders attempting to influence implementation structures. In January 2011, a revisioning exercise was undertaken, after which it is described that purposive actions were taken by senior management to put in place another project lead of AFI, drawn from the group of ADTLs. This account constructs a process by which senior management consulted, initially with one ADTL regarding the project lead role to determine if it could be combined with the ADTL's current position within the Faculty (ibid). Within this account senior management liaised with the ADTLs to outline a new structure to drive AFI as well as a description of the role of the project lead, expressions of interest were sought from amongst the ADTLs (DCU, 2011a) an unanticipated consequence to this was that no ADTL though applied. This account of an ADTL interprets the dynamics of the process:

We turned around as a group to senior management, you tell us what you want and we'll tell you who should run it then, either give you steering or advice or even put ourselves forward and the response we got back was that senior management wanted to work out the plan with the new leader, they wanted to decide all of this with the new person...that's where the negotiations with senior management broke down with the AD's and the senior management in terms of leadership. We said choose what you want to do, make a decision, what is AFI phase 2 going to be? And they said no we'll decide that with whoever is the project lead. It didn't make sense to me and I think that's where negotiations fell.

(ADTL, 2011)

An account from a senior institutional level participant contextualised for him why this approach had been taken. He indicated that there was a perception that the project was stagnating because of the absence of a clear champion and implementation structure:

It needed a champion, that's my feeling like with any initiative you need really a strong champion and we tried to create a process for that champion to be put in place but for various reasons, some various reasons that didn't work out. But it did highlight for me a deficit in the structure of execution.

(UTL07, 2011)

Accounts from other senior institutional participants interpreted that the context of the environment of the university and its associated structures particularly those at senior management were central to the issues of implementation with the project:

In a sense there has been no clear responsibility for who should ultimately be carrying the can, which should be driving this...

(UTL03, 2011)

The AFI project group, (which had morphed out of AFI Executive and included wider institutional representation) met until March 2011. A further proposal was made to expand the membership of the group to include the interface group at an AFI interface meeting in April (DCU, 2011b). However, the dynamic and changing structures are reported within accounts to have culminated at this meeting and participants construct a fractious meeting with tension rising between some institutional level implementers. In early summer 2011, one AFI Executive participant of the study interpreted that AFI as a project had officially ended:

...the project is coming to its natural conclusion. It's a 3 year project so really it should be concluding around now and with the exception of the quality assurance around the learning outcomes, anything else that's still outstanding is normal business and should be able to go through the normal channels

(AFIMGT09, 2011)

The implementation structures as set out in Figure 6 present a complex diagram of implementation structures within the AFI process. These structures reflect the institutional environment in which they were set, where many decisions evolve out of a wide number of committee based structures. This study presents a tension between the initial collegial academic based structure and a hierarchical approach to implementation within the institution. A further finding demonstrates how the complexity and diffused decision making structures within the university were interpreted to have impacted implementation. As previously discussed within this theme, accounts of the central implementation structure describe its evolution from

a collegial structure linked to the approach adopted by the ADTLs to engage within their roles in the newly constituted faculty system in the university. The evolving dynamic of implementation structures and the contested membership of AFI Executive were previously considered in this theme. Further contradictions within participant accounts are evident with regards to the scope of the role of the Academic Leader and the responsibilities associated with this role as the project evolved. Within academic participant accounts there is initially an overwhelming support for the appointment of a senior member of academic staff to lead AFI. This view is explained that it gave the necessary academic gravitas to the project. The role was seen as maintaining the academic focus of the initiative in such accounts but not actually being responsible operation of the initiative on the ground:

...X is a full prof so X has an element of status therefore X brings a bit of clout to the role...So rank is required to drive the process...But from an inward looking perspective I would've said it was about making sure that it was about the big picture, the planning not about the implementation. I would of said it was about the planning, the tracking of things - policy and decision making. Not actual implementation

(ASSOCIATE06, 2009)

As previously outlined the Academic Leader was not the AFI budget holder and AFI Executive in itself had no vested authority to instruct members of staff. A common interpretation of the context of the authority of AFI Executive is provided by the following participant:

You see that's one thing which is really characteristic of this whole thing. Is the people who actually are trying to instil change have no managerial authority. If you look at the Xs none of us we are not line managers. We cannot tell somebody you have to do that. So it's all through persuasion.

(AFIMGT02, 2009)

The absence of this authority which was linked to "line management" manifested it many ways within accounts to interpret and contextualise how events unfolded in events and event waves. For example the issue of quality assuring the module

learning outcomes came to ahead and within accounts the only way by which to assure that within all schools modules had been verified as being up to standard was to diffuse this responsibility to the local line managers of academics i.e. Heads of School. This proposal was reported within the university's Education Committee<sup>21</sup> minutes that the VPLI made a recommendation to the Deans who sit on this committee to task their Heads of Schools to verify and validate their schools modules before module LOs were publicly published on the internet (DCU, 2010c). As the operational elements of implementation rolled-out within institutional level participants' accounts both within AFI Executive, interpret that both the role of the academic leader and the composition of AFI Executive needed to evolve:

...job then is principally on the academic side and it may well be appropriate to now look again at in the same way as the emphasise is shifting from the academic end to the information systems end, it may well be appropriate to ask the question what kind of leadership function is needed now and it changes and X period was for 3 years which comes up later this year so for X, the right thing to do would be to examine that and look at that and see what the project needs now, like I mentioned in terms of the fellowships so we're at a different stage and there's an obligation on us to see what's the best way to go from here.

(AFIMGT01, 2010)

Participant data at the institutional level illustrates that the diffusion of responsibility and indeed participation was required within the process as the AFI Executive structure was functioning within the wider institutional system. The complexity of the implementation structures illustrated in Figure 6 is a representation of those directly deemed responsible for implementation within the process based on the analysis of participant and project documentation.

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<sup>21</sup> A senior level university committee which advises on academic strategy comprising of most senior members of staff within the university

#### **4.9.2 Implementation Structures at Department Level**

Lower down the implementation staircase accounts of departmental level data implementation and structures include environmental contexts to explain both how academics and AFI Fellows engaged in implementation. These findings demonstrate the dynamic of implementation and also indicate how implementation was shaped and oriented by both practice and context within local environments. Actions of AFI Fellows were not always totally in tune with the process' canonical practices. Findings from Fellows demonstrate and contextualise that their motives, attitude and actions of implementation was shaped by and oriented by current practices and in response to local environments. Those AFI Fellows, who were linked to schools where a learning outcomes paradigm had been implemented by external professional accreditation bodies, interpreted this context within their accounts to explain for the limited resistance, and full engagement with the process in their locales. Notably, though even in these accounts the nuances of the local environment within the school is present.

AFI Fellows were instructed by AFI Executive to encourage colleagues to engage in the process and to complete implementation. AFI Fellows were then asked to critique module descriptors of colleagues, focusing on the learning outcomes and the constructive alignment between these and the assessment. Some AFI Fellows interpreted this practice as being contradictory to the practice and context of an academic environment. The context of peer-review is widespread in academia, however, some AFI Fellows perceived themselves as junior members of academic staff<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> The profile of AFI Fellows was such that the majority of them were at Lecturer grades, a small proportion of Fellows were at Senior Lecturers grade and an even smaller amount were at Professorial grades

They viewed that this context situated the difficulty they had with either critiquing or encouraging senior academics to engage with the process and to provide feedback to them on their modules, as experts in their respective fields:

...I don't know whether we should have been trying to convince our fellow colleagues to get on board, I think that should of come from higher up because it has more credibility because somebody like me going to a well-established professor and trying to influence them is very difficult. And you know it is not something I feel comfortable with you know and I think more focus on the X heads and getting X heads to buy into should have been, should of happened really. But at the end of the day... so I think maybe who was allowed to be appointed a fellow maybe should have been looked at, in a little bit more of a stringent way. It was kind of like do you want to do it, nobody else wants to do it, here you go, you know.

(ASSOCIATE13, 2009)

Within other accounts the context of academic seniority of the Fellows was interpreted to be important to progress local implementation:

...it would have been better in our school if a more senior colleague had been step up to this role, it would've carried more weight with people and that.

(ASSOCIATE18, 2009)

A perceived need for academic seniority was also identified as a necessary context for leading institutional implementation. The dynamic of implementation by AFI Fellows was mediated by local environments.

AFI Fellows accounts include interpretations of how fellows adopted their own particular strategies to engage with the canonical practice of implementation to reflect the specific local contexts and to maintain their own position within the local environment:

...but what we did was when I sat down with them I gave them a copy of my old learning outcomes and a copy of my new ones. And said look this is where I started and this is where I finished, this is the process that I went through, this is why I made these changes this is how the assessment grew to what it is. So I explained that and then basically left it to the people, I put it back to them and if you have any problems, difficulties come to me. But I didn't chase them up in terms of reading what they done and saying no that was right or wrong. So if they came back to me, which some people did not many but a few people then they came over to the office and we were able to go through it. But if they felt they were happy with it and they wanted to submit it as was they submitted it as was, because I wasn't going to say that it was wrong. I let the team over there say that's wrong, because that's a better scenario from my point of view...When I am working on a par with people, like I am not a School Head and I don't want to be a School head. So I don't want to have that tiered relationship with them in anyway, we work together and we work collaboratively...

(ASSOCIATE07, 2009)

Whilst other participant data contextualises that for Fellows to adopt an advocate role within their own local contexts, would be interpreted as questioning the fundamental professionalism of colleagues (ASSOCIATE14, 2009 , ASSOCIATE17, 2009). All of these contexts are provided within participant accounts as they interpreted the nuances of implementation structures implemented within local school environments.

Within another school whose discipline area was strongly associated with the objectives of the reform the account of the AFI Fellow interprets the strategy he adopted in relation to implementation in his school where he describes the necessity of intra school dialogue to facilitate academic debate:

...but we did between us, circulate different points of view and different writings on say the development of learning outcomes, so we just didn't look at just one particular academic view point but we circulated that to everybody. But we really had an idea, of as a School as to where we are going with that. We have a consensus really on to a certain degree on designing and writing learning outcomes, it is what we do a lot of us, anyway so we didn't consider bringing anybody else externally in  
(ASSOCIATE20, 2009)

These findings provide insight into the role of local situated contexts of which AFI Fellows navigated during implementation. Further accounts of local implementation structures were developed in sections 4.7.3 and 4.7.4. The next chapter considers the findings presented in this chapter with respect to the study's theoretical framework.



## **5 Discussion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter considers the case findings with respect to the theoretical framework outlined in chapter two. The theoretical framework was developed in support of an ideographic approach to policy, which argues against adopting a purely rational-purposive approach and conception of the policy process. The findings presented in the preceding chapter illustrate that implementation as constructed by participants is not readily reduced or coherent with a strictly rational-purposive approach to policy or indeed policy implementation. A significant feature of the findings of the planned initiative is the notion of policy on the move, and policy being made and remade by implementers, within their own situated contexts. The use of the implementation staircase provided a means by which sense making by individuals at two levels of the staircase within the institution was examined i.e. institutional and departmental. Applying Dawson's (2003a) processual/contextualist perspective in this study underpinned an ideographic approach to policy analysis. This was achieved as this perspective inherently and consistently disputes the notion that one grand theory of implementation exists.

Furthermore, within this perspective, there is a focus both on the context(s) and the politics of implementation. By focusing on the politics of implementation, the dynamics of policy are foregrounded and by considering contexts, the situated action and implementation of implementers was explored. The findings of the study are indicative of traditional implementation study emphasising the how of implementation. They should not be considered from an evaluation study's perspective i.e. centring on an evaluation of the outcomes of a given policy along with the provision of practical advice for improvement to implementers (Kohoutek, 2013).

## 5.2 Rational Purposive and Ideographic Policy Implementation

Adopting a rational purposive conception of policy implementation implies that the policy process can be conceived, managed and ultimately implemented based on sequential structured logic. The findings of this study, however, demonstrate that simply reducing policy and policy implementation to this abstraction does not adequately capture the complexity of implementation. Furthermore, the findings support and develop the notion of policy being made and re-made and that policy is not a static concept. The findings illustrate that by broadening the conception of policy to consider policy as "...text and action, word and deeds" (Ball, 1994) the complexity and non-linear elements of a policy processes come into frame. Furthermore, the findings support ideographic theory which asserts that situated contexts of implementers contribute to implementation gaps that arise within the policy implementation process.

The findings contrast with the rational-purposive approach to "gap-analysis". The objective of such an analysis is to form the basis to of models or prescriptions of conditions for implementers to manage implementation, which is strongly associated with top-down rationalistic approaches to implementation (Cerych and Sabatier, 1986). These approaches are commensurate with evaluation studies which are in contrast with traditional implementation studies focusing on the how of implementation (Kohoutek, 2013). Conducting a traditional implementation study such as AFI does not produce such lists of pre-requisites. What this study does do similar to other implementation studies is concentrate the analysis on the construction of practices within specific settings. In this study the focus was the implementation of the AFI within an academic environment. Centring the focus on practice, and filtering for context and complexity, also brings issues of structure and agency into the scope of a policy implementation analysis. This study supports an

agentic perspective within the policy process, and the application of the processual/contextualist perspective supports the notion that actors engage in political activities within the policy process to construct and reconstruct policy. These issues are discussed in subsequent sections of this chapter. Further to this, the findings support the literature that found that policy implementation within institutions is more complex than just following a linear process of the writing of policy texts by hierarchies at institutional, national or supra-national levels (Gornitzka et al., 2005 , Kohoutek, 2013). Policy was made and remade in AFI by the actions and policy interpretations of implementers, at different levels on the implementation staircase and situated within their own local contexts and experiences (Reynolds and Saunders, 1987).

Furthermore, the findings develop the notion of complex academic environments in higher education where the boundaries between roles and structures of colleagues both administrative and academic are becoming increasingly blurred. AFI implementation as a teaching and learning reform was not solely the domain of academics but the process of implementation included a variety of institutional participants, whose functions traversed across academic and administrative domains. Hussy and Smith (2010) identify this with the role change of administrative staff within higher education and their increasing engagement with teaching and learning processes. This study does not support a contention in relation to the increased role of administrative staff in the teaching and learning process neither does it dispute the same as it did not include a definition of teaching and learning process. The study does develop Hussy and Smith's (ibid) assertion in so far that this crossover can also be considered as synchronous i.e. from both administrative to academic but also from academic to administrative. The study provides insights into situated contexts of institutional implementers from both academic and administrative perspectives where these roles and structures are blurred. It is,

therefore, argued that these findings emphasise and extend the knowledge relating to the changing dynamic of implementation in academic environments, and can be used to inform the design of implementation within these contexts.

The responsiveness of policy to its environment is also evident in the findings presented in this study. Further to this, and extending this it is argued here that the findings promote the question as to how an implementation process can be rationally considered if both historical and social contexts are not part of the theoretical frame (Trowler, 2008). Omitting these elements from an analysis of implementation introduces a positivistic bias which is neither rational nor coherent, whilst being latently subjective by the same terms of reference. The AFI findings are consistent with this. Accounts of implementation support the ideographic notion of contextual contingency and how perspectives of the underlying issues being addressed in implementation were not uniquely related to the actual policy implementation. Coherent policy and implementation is a central tenet of rational-purposive policy implementation (Hill, 2009). The ideographic findings of AFI support the argument that policy implementation has many incoherent elements associated with it. It is also suggested based on these findings that coherency is a function of the environment in which it is set and that attempting to apply a prescriptive formula for implementation is potentially misleading to would-be implementers (Kappler, 2007).

AFI as a planned initiative was presented as a coherent policy framework for implementation with an associate timeframe for its implementation; as such it was viewed as a planned implementation. It is reported within the findings that it received unanimous support from AC which is predominantly comprised of academic staff within the institution. As implementation evolved the canonical practices such as the writing of learning outcomes and their alignment was viewed

as adopting a one size will fit all approach and the coherency of the policy was disputed. This approach, disputed within the findings demonstrated the incoherency of implementation to implementers based on their situational-context and practice. From this respect, it is argued in a later section of this chapter that contextual simplification in itself is not a static concept when analysing policy implementation.

The study also supports contentions within the literature that higher education institutions are multi-contextual and multi-cultured environments (Trowler, 2008), with various attributes of school culture emerging from the constructions in AFI findings as research-focused, teaching-focused, promotion-centric etc. The complexity of implementation was influenced by these and furthermore, the findings presented contradictions and competing histories by implementers relating to these. By presenting the findings in this way the study of AFI has supported the call for implementation research to consider the complexity of the process and not to reduce that complexity to a strictly rational or linear form (Collins, 1998). The AFI case supported and developed the notion of contradictions of policy implementation and also that policy implementation and the dynamics of the policy environment can lead to policy paradoxes (Trowler, 2002). The development of the AFI proposals supported the literature with regards to contested policy-making but also developed this notion as a continual feature of the implementation policy process. The findings presented under the theme of fluid implementation structure supported the evolving situational dynamic of implementation, which was not limited to the initial process of encoding the AFI proposals.

The findings within this study supported the contention from the literature that universities are engaged with a wide range of activities or as described by Trowler (2008) as universities engaged with various “games”. Although the case did not explicitly construct these games, the constructions of participants contextualised the

internal and external games that the university was perceived to be playing. The documented AFI policy proposals provide insight into a range of these associated with teaching and learning; flexible learning, student engagement, lifelong learning, quality promotion etc. The findings relating to SIF contextualise the game of obtaining funding from the government and engagement of inter-institutional collaboration. The following sections continue the discussion of the findings of AFI with respect to an ideographic approach to analyse policy implementation under specific headings associated with the study's theoretical framework.

### **5.3 Implementation Gap**

The discussion of policy implementation gaps is structured through the consideration of contextual simplification, causal simplification, meaning and affect, contextual occlusion and the non-canonical practices with respect to the AFI Findings.

#### **5.3.1 Contextual Simplification**

Contextual simplification is not only limited to how an implementation process potentially ignores, simplistically reduces or (mis)aligns contexts but can also be considered ultimately with respect to its continuing impact on implementation. The findings of AFI demonstrate that contextual simplification is not only limited to the formulation/planning of an initiative but it also a feature of evolving implementation processes. Considering contextual simplification from the policy formulation perspective, these findings assert that an initial consultative process was engaged in with by implementers with input from various stakeholders. Consultation is usually considered as an activity employed to mitigate contextual simplification within an implementation process (Trowler and Knight, 2002). Achieving consensus is a notoriously difficult task independent of policy perspective. As has been previously

discussed, universities are environments of multiple contexts and cultures. From this basis considering the encoding of policy as a step in contextual abstraction might be more appropriate than purely from the perspective of contextual simplification. This is supportive of what Trowler (2008) asserts that policy group are planning for implementation and not for actual practice in this case findings of departmental participants provide construction were both elements were attempted. It is from this basis that it is argued that contextual simplification can be considered as an evolving notion; particularly if policy is made and remade as it progresses. Furthermore, by accepting that contextual simplification is a characteristic of ideographic policy, research in this vein takes upon itself the notion of bounded rationality. By doing there is an inherent acknowledgement of the fact that planners cannot rationally expect to understand all of the consequences and alternatives that will emerge in an implementation process (Parsons, 1995). Trowler (2008) has identified that practitioners turned policy planners too lose sight of diversity and local contexts. AFI findings support this contention.

A further basis by which the concept of contextual simplification can be developed is through the analysis of practice in terms of the canonical practices of implementation and how they develop during implementation. AFI's implementation schedule is an example of this i.e. the roadmap of implementation (canonical practice). The schedule did not remain a static document, and it went through a number of iterations as contextual situations came to light and/or the complexity of specific context were developed and revealed. From this respect although road maps are metaphorically and theoretically representative of canonical practices implying rigidity and the absence of fluidity of implementation (Brown and Duguid, 1991). The case study illustrates the iterative re-creation of policy as feedback was received by AFI Executive within their level but also from lower levels within the

process, which is consistent with the notion of policy making and re-making (Ball, 1994).

The findings, nevertheless, support the traditional concept of contextual simplification in its traditional sense as policy was implemented. The findings also identify unanticipated consequences for the process linked to contextual simplification including the political activities engaged in by institutional participants. Further to this the findings to promote the question which has been referred to the literature (Trowler and Knight, 2002), as to whether contextual simplification is engaged in by implementers and other stakeholders to control and or advance a particular implementation agenda. In the case of this study perceptions of the role of the AFI Executive are constructed by participants particularly around this question and the event wave of modularisation i.e. flexibility. Furthermore, the findings imply that contextual simplification was used as a tool by some implementers within the process in their defence of maintaining the status quo and to contextualise their resistance. Contextual simplification can also be considered with respect to the role of some of the identified change or policy agents within the process. The findings indicate that for some AFI Fellows, the context of their academic status within the institution was perceived to transgress situated custom and practice relating to quality assurance processes, subject expertise and peer review. The findings support the notion of the emergence of non-canonical practices to include the refinement of implementation practice to circumvent contextual issues such as one-to-one sessions with academics, group reviews by AFI Fellows or not pursuing the quality review role of colleagues work as set out in the AFI Fellow description. Further to this, contextual simplification identified in the findings supported the theoretical framework which advocated that backgrounds, contexts and experiences are important considerations in implementation design. The findings refer to AFI Executive consisting mainly of senior academics with many years' experience within



the institution; furthermore the Associate Deans would have provided feedback to colleagues on various matters as part of their role within Faculties. The mismatch between professional contexts can be seen perhaps to the breadth of the AFI Fellow role, which was constructed as being at odds with situated contexts, particularly by those Fellows at lower academic grades (Trowler, 2002).

### **5.3.2 Causal simplification**

AFI was a planned change initiative within the university and elements of a rational-purposive approach to implementation can be identified from perceptions of participants and also within the canonical practices implemented during the initiative. The application of the processual/contextualist perspective did not negate for implementation being constructed in such terms. The structures implemented within the project conform with what Trowler and Knight (2002) identify as a top-down technical rational understanding of implementation with the appointment of an Academic Leader and the AFI Fellows as enthusiastic advocates to lead the change at the university level and as local advocates within departments/schools. Constructions of the AFI process by implementers as considered under the themes of unanticipated consequences to purposive actions and fluid implementation structures, however, do not suggest that the ingredients or the pre-requisites for successful implementation associated with such an approach were achieved (Cerych and Sabatier, 1986). Furthermore, in spite of the achievement or not of pre-requisites, this thesis argues that it is necessary to explain any process of implementation “more by loops than lines” (Pettigrew, 1990:270) the findings support this contention.

The situated character of implementation based on individual, local and the wider organisational context depicted in the findings support the literature where the difficulty of adopting a top-down approach to implementation by attempting to ignore what Trowler and Knight (2002:146) have described as the:

...values, attitudes, assumptions, and taken-for-granted recurrent practices may be different from department to department, building to building in on one higher education institution...

The detailed alignment matrix introduced in AFI, was constructed as how the values and epistemology of education for some programme chairs from one Faculty could not be reconciled with the outcomes based paradigm and the mechanistic practice of aligning learning within modules and programmes.

### **5.3.3 *Meaning and Affect***

The support that was initially received by the AFI was constructed in the main as identifying a potential willingness to change the status quo of practice. This consensus buoyed implementers. As implementation evolved along the staircase tensions came to the surface as the practice and details of policy became situated within local contexts (Brown and Duguid, 1991). The findings support the notion of meaning and affect contributing to implementation gaps from the literature (Trowler and Knight, 2002). The study developed this notion by providing context to the effect of the “obliteration of meaning and effect” (Trowler, 2008:155) for implementers by contextualising the political activities by implementers from this basis. Political activities ranged within Schools from passive resistance of the change, to minor acts of defiance to active attempts to subvert implementation within local contexts. Whether these acts were due to the personal attachment to the status quo or whether a more complex conceptualisation of the status quo being

intrinsically linked with the expert's own self, cannot be concluded from the case's findings (Trowler and Knight, 2002). Issues relating to meaning and affect were linked to the perceived contextual simplicity of the implementation process as the process rolled out. Changing of the status quo was questioned when some participants felt that the contexts of their situations had not been considered with respect to implementation and that their own professional practice and skill had not been considered (ibid) examples of these permeate at the university level with respect to the development of modules descriptors, to the writing of Marks and Standards and within the Faculty relating to the approval of academic structures. This finding is consistent to what Trowler (2008:155) describes as planners of implementation "lose sight ...of the rough terrain" of local contexts.

#### **5.3.4 Contextual Occlusion**

Contextual occlusion relating to the difficulty of integrating local knowledge within a policy process as considered by Reynolds and Saunders (1987) is supported within the findings. The politics of change relating to the AFI management structures illustrated the complexity of the context that planning was conducted in within the initiative. Most members of AFI executive were in the main members of frontline academic or support unit staff, vastly experienced in teaching practices, with some insight into academic administration practices and experienced of working with most academic support units within their own roles. Trowler and Knight (2002: 145) suggestion that occlusion occurs when the context of the planning environment "...obscures what are sometimes otherwise well-known characteristics of the context of practice." Within this discussion it is suggested that occlusion is always to some degree an element of an implementation processes? Planning contexts cannot replicate the multiple situated contexts that are acknowledged to exist within universities they can though attempt to inform themselves of them, albeit within

limits. Attempts were made to limit occlusion from mainly academic participants particularly in the development of the AFI proposals and when feedback was sought from the AFI Fellows during the process. The provision of feedback though does not necessarily prohibit occlusion. Establishing consensus would appear to support occlusion and promote policy paradoxes as achieving consensus usually involves negotiation, bargaining. In some cases implementers agreeing to implementation positions that might not always take into account a particular situated context. Furthermore, the findings suggest that trying to avoid occlusion may stagnate implementation processes and be used as a means of resistance by implementers. This can be seen in the findings when attempts were made to alter the academic structures process.

### **5.3.5 *Non-Canonical Practices***

The findings contrast the canonical practices or roadmap for implementation within the institution with the non-canonical implementation. This contrast supports the contention that discretion is held by implementers to develop and re-interpret understandings, to implement work-arounds and to re-construct tasks and roles (Lipsky, 1980). Within the case the findings support how canonical practice will be interpreted by practice by those implementing them. An example drawn from the case relating to the substance of change demonstrates how some programme chairs and AFI Fellows re-constructed and re-interpreted the task of entering module descriptors along the continuum of a formulaic and template-driven task to describe modules, to an exercise to review and holistically re-design programmes and modules. Based on these constructions a variety of canonical practices were engaged with. The findings relating to the politics of change extend the notion that changing canonical practice can be parts of wider political and power relations relating to the application of this discretion. The perceived lack of authority or the

actual lack of authority associated with the discretion of academics perceived by some participants was situated and rooted in the wider contexts for participants relating to academic autonomy, collegiality, seniority and management position (Johnson, 2002). Ultimately as the process evolved, the means by which Bologna compliance would be achieved increased in complexity. The findings support that AFI Executive participants planned a process based on an abstracted form of practices within the institutions in spite of the practice of writing learning outcomes not being wide spread in the institution (Brown and Duguid, 1991). In doing this they advocated the change to practice which integrated some elements of current academic practices and refined them to include new and refined concepts, essentially constructing a process by which modules would be described. To achieve this some participants felt that this was an overt attempt to deconstruct a variety of associated academic and administrative practices with the associated difficulties of meaning and affect arising.

I don't know if they, if they fully understood the way we work, when they set out on this and that's something that could of easily been sorted out.  
(ASSOCIATE14, 2009)

The deconstruction of practices, however, had been flagged within the AFI proposal (DCU, 2007b). In spite of directive canonical practices being set out, local implementation within Faculty, Schools and programmes revealed in the findings of AFI Fellows and Programme Chairs that active decisions were made to circumvent, alter or actively manipulate this new practice and to change them based on local situated contexts with conflicting interests and unique political and value systems.

Brown and Duguid (1991) argued that canonical practices mask what actual practice is but also the innovation and the learning associated with this. The findings do not extend to inform if innovation or learning was masked by the canonical practices developed within AFI but they do provide insight into the perceptions of

the practice by implementers. In the case of this study the implementation gap was examined on the non-canonical practices of implementers which is consistent with the focus of implementation studies as opposed to evaluation studies (Goggin, 1986). Non-canonical practices can also be interpreted in terms of the direct and indirect influence of those at various levels on the implementation staircase i.e. the strategies of the lowest level of implementers is indirectly supported or influenced by those at higher levels and vice versa (Reynolds and Saunders, 1987). The political activities and events of the case with regard to the Module System demonstrated the influence of actors on each other in policy implementation independent of their position on the staircase e.g. the strategies adopted by administrative staff with regards to the system and those implemented by academic staff. Furthermore, with respect to the notion of implementation gaps the substance of implementation supports the ideographic notion of the active agency of participants within the study of adapting policy based on their own context, sense-making and circumstances (Trowler, 2008).

#### 5.4 Policy Location and Approaches to Implementation Research

The findings supports the contention of bottom-up advocates of implementation studies asserting that those implementing policy at lower levels have a discretionary influence on policy objectives (Lipsky, 1971b). This issue must be contextualised further in respect of this case where the literature posits that within higher education institutions non-canonical practices are more likely due to the nature of the institutions (Trowler, 2008). In spite of this, the findings suggest that the discretionary influence of street level bureaucrats is not without restriction. The study supports the literature when it states that the structural power within the institution is greater than that of the implementation structure i.e. AFI Executive. One of the main criticisms of bottom-up frameworks, however, is the implication that there is an overemphasis on the degree of autonomy of local level actors due to the methodology applied (Matland, 1995). Potentially, from the point of view of this study what is most significant about this criticism relates to the processual/contextualist perspective.

Dawson's (2003a) perspective built on Pettigrew's (1985b) seminal work to include a broader spectrum of actors to examine change processes. With respect to this study, actors were drawn from a variety of levels within the university, and include institutional and departmental and explore the perceptions of implementation from a wider range of employees rather than focusing on senior managers implementing or trying to manage implementation (Dawson, 2003a: 22). Furthermore, the findings derived from these levels within the case provide insight into the scope of autonomy of participants at the various levels. Moreover, the case supports ideographic policy advocating that the position of participants within the policy process shaped their interpretation and construction of meaning relating to implementation (Reynolds and Saunders, 1987).

Furthermore, as previously discussed AFI as a teaching and learning reform was not only in the domain of street level bureaucrats from the academic community but involved implementers from the university's administrative units and departments. The findings illustrate the tension that existed between the contexts of implementation when conceptions of policy and implementation coincided. The approach within this study can be described in the main as bottom-up. The study did include those who were essentially charged with managing and steering implementation at the central level i.e. from the management perspective. This was an important aspect of this study as it illuminated the dynamic of the policy encoding process at the institutional level. The study did not evaluate if the objectives of this process were or were not achieved by implementers at lower levels on the implementation staircase. This study's objectives, therefore, stand in contrast with pure top-down studies. The findings negotiate their way through the notion that policy and implementation is planned, but also that policy is not a static concept it is a process which is made and re-made as it is received, encoded and actioned. This study, therefore, can be considered to explore somewhat Trowler's (2008) notion of implementation in higher education being more akin to the market garden, where planning is included but with recognised caveats relating to the multitude of local contexts.

### **5.5 Implementation Research in Higher Education**

The study supports implementation studies research into higher education which reject highly rational and a focus on the linear causality between the implementation of governmental/supra-national policy with the outcomes of change processes within institutions (Gornitzka, 2000). Further to this the findings relating to the context of change support the contention that the introduction of legislation or the implementation of another policy instrument did not automatically jump-start a linear



implementation process within the institution (Brinkerhoff, 1996). The contextual findings illustrate that participants drew on historical activities both within the institution and also externally as influencing the commencement of the implementation process even though it is recognised that AFI was a planned initiative. This finding supports the notion that establishing the initiation point for any policy even if a planned implementation is conceived it is not always a straightforward task and that policies evolve from past historical activities (Hill, 2009).

### **5.6 Processual/Contextualist Perspective**

The application of the processual/contextualist perspective to analyse a planned policy illustrated in this case. This supported Dawson's (2003b) contention of its ability to consider implementation from this basis. Dawson's three phases of conception, transition and operation of implementation did not in itself endorse a linear approach. The perspective was developed partially to counteract the criticism of the limitation of the processual/contextualist perspective in providing practical advice to management. The case findings illustrate and are consistent with Palmer, Dunkin and Akin's (2006:206) assertion, that the processual/contextualist approach is primarily concerned with providing a detailed understanding of implementation and not the development of a menu-driven approach. The thematic analysis of the case findings can provide the basis for further analysis of implementation based on practise-base management models, but such analysis should not lose sight of the complexity of capturing implementation in flight (Doyle et al., 2000 , Kappler, 2007 , Pettigrew et al., 2001). This study did not unearth one grand theory of implementation by providing a single account of implementation.

The findings of the study provide competing histories, from those programme chairs who interpreted implementation as changing policy instruments within the university to those who viewed it as the introduction of another bureaucratic layer within the university and as a tick the box exercise.

### **5.6.1 Agency and Structure**

The findings relating to the politics of implementation focused the analysis on the dynamics of interaction of actors and systems in motion and it supports the link between context, action and structure (Giddens, 2006). The case supports and illustrates the interplay of these three elements and how they were manipulated by individuals or groups to achieve specific outcomes (Pettigrew, 1990). The implementation of AFI was shaped by organisational structures and agency leading to internal political activities. The findings emphasised at both levels on the implementation staircase, an orientation to the maintenance of the status tension between continuing with the status quo (Trowler, 2002). The evolving teaching and learning structures within the university, the actions of the ADTLs, Head of LIU and VPLI/Registrar and the internal and external strategic context in relation to funding can all be considered in this regard at the university level. What is interesting about the analysis of this interplay is not only the achievement or reaching of specific outcomes by the various groups concerned i.e. initiating the AFI project, introducing a Module System, or the embedding and the subsequent change to the role of ADTLs within university structures but rather it is the inherent dynamism is revealed (Trowler et al., 2003). The emphasis of which is consistent with the language of being to becoming. The findings include competing constructions and interpretations of implementation by those involved and as such is consistent with Elger's (1975) view on the importance of participants in the analysis and representation of processual research. Individual agency did not negate the notion of implementation being facilitated through collective action which the findings supported (Schlager,

2007). The politics of implementation uncovered patterns of those who were politically active within policy design and implementation of AFI and as such is consistent with a social constructionist perspective of the policy process and its treatment of collective action (Ingram, Schneider and deLeon, 2007). The theme of fluidity of implementation structures supported the contention of the power of the implementation being weaker than those of institutional structures (Trowler, 2008). AFI structures were shaped and influenced by the wider and more powerful institutional structures. These more permanent structures can also be viewed as contributing to the dynamic and tension of implementation. AFI findings support the assertion that it is through the leveraging of rules associated with the participation in institutional structures that constituencies within the process can be politically empowered or weakened within a policy process (Ingram et al., 2007). Further to this exploring the changing dynamic between actors and evolving relationships adds to the research of policy implementation within higher education, which asserts that this dynamic can influence variations in policy design/implementation and informs the process and context by which policy is made and thus implemented (Trowler, 2002).

### ***5.6.2 Event-Driven Approach and Temporal Interconnectivity***

The findings of the study support the event-driven approach to the analysis of implementation by focusing on the dynamic of implementation associated with the “language of being to becoming” (Demers, 2007: 103). The findings thus aligns with the categorisation of the processual/contextualist approach within Van de Ven and Poole’s (1995) third definition of process, as viewing change as a sequence of events. The definition of process as the sequencing of events may imply a linear analysis but this study demonstrated that participants drew on events and a more nuanced notion of abstract event waves. Participants introduced temporal

interconnectivity mainly with respect to the institutional and internal context when considering change (Pettigrew, 1990). The implicit recognition of temporality in this analysis is noteworthy as its importance is emphasised both within the educational research and organisational behaviour literature (Avital, 2000 , Ball, 1997 , George and Jones, 2000 , Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991). This was particularly evidenced in the identification of modularisation and the evolution of teaching and learning structures as internal contexts of change by participants. Participants drew on historical events within their accounts to construct how implementation was currently being affected and how it would influence implementation into the future. Their experience can be viewed as George and Jones (2000) assert by what has been and what is believed to come. Temporal interconnectivity was therefore not limited to the historical context but also to the sense making completed by participants in relation to the interpretation of policy and to contextualise their own implementation strategy (Reynolds and Saunders, 1987 , Trowler, 2002). Orlikowski (1996) work on the notion of situated change is a more consistent categorisation of the findings of this study. This categorisation is consistent with the non-linear notion of implementation based on the introduction of a reform in higher education (Bleiklie et al., 2000). Although the initiation of the AFI set in cycle a series of discrete events, implementation was neither purely continuous nor episodic but rather a combination of both.

### **5.6.3 Power and Politics**

Further to the interaction of action, structure and context reveal both positive and negative connotations of power and politics by participants. Buchanan and Baddy (1999) criticise the cultivation of only positive understandings of these positions, however, the findings provided both. Conceptions of power and politics from the ideographic policy literature do not particularly emphasise either positive or negative conception of these, they do recognise that they instrumental in the policy process

(Ball, 1994 , Bleiklie, 2002). Dawson's sub-categories categorise political and power activities they do not, however, provide a mechanism to examine and analyse these activities from the perspective of acknowledged political strategies from the organisational or strategy literature (Minzberg, Ahlstrand and Lampel, 1998). This position is not incongruent with the literature from an ideographic perspective. Pettigrew (1985a , 1985b) implicitly acknowledges, however, that such political strategies exist and that implementation brings tension in the organisation, threatening the position of some actors whilst providing opportunities to others. The findings of this case support his position. The findings also support the notion that political activities are not always explicit acts which are widely known throughout the organisation (Schlesinger et al., 1992). Indeed, many of the political activities described in construction by institutional implementers were not known by key implementers within the process, most AFI Fellows.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

This chapter situated and discussed the study's findings within the theoretical framework as set out in chapter two. The findings support and extend a central argument of thesis for the inclusion of ideographic conceptions of the policy process to be included in the analysis of policy implementation. The study by implementing a processual/contextualist perspective was able to conduct an ideographic policy analysis and to consider this implementation from an agentic perspective. Further, to this the development of a case study of implementation is considered based on the study's methodological design as a finding in itself. The development of this case achieved one of the objectives of this study to develop a piece of institutional research. Moreover, by implementing the processual/contextualist perspective as part of an ideographic policy analysis this study has demonstrated the application of a further theoretical and methodological lens by which policy implementation conceptualised as organisational change can be conducted.

## 6 Conclusions

### 6.1 Summary of the Study

The overarching aim of this study was to complete an ideographic analysis of policy implementation within one university in Ireland, to reveal how implementation is conducted in practice. The literature of policy implementation raises concerns of adopting a purely linear or rational approach to the analysis of (Burnes, 1996, Hill and Hupe, 2009). The processual/contextualist perspective facilitated an in-depth, longitudinal analysis of implementation, which influenced both the methodological and analytical treatment of the data. This study conceptualised implementation as a process comprising of events and of event waves (Peterson, 1998). The findings centred on the accounts of implementation based on the constructions of actors engaged with a planned implementation initiative within the university. Such an analysis is consistent with the perspective of Elmore (1979) of engaging in policy analysis which is inclusive of the street-level bureaucrats. Temporality was an important issue, not only in the longitudinal design of the study, but also in terms of the evolution of interpretation over time.

Ideographic and process perspectives do not advocate recipe-book or lists of pre-requisites to implementation. A criticism most often cited of rational-purposive management models within the literature (Doyle et al., 2000). This study, rather, provides a detailed understanding and analysis of the complexities of implementation (Collins, 1998). The objective of the approach is to analyse the how of implementation and to consider implementation “more by loops than lines” (Pettigrew, 1990: 270). The study adopted primarily a thematic and narrative sense making strategy to its analysis, which is a consistent analysis strategy considered by both Langley (1999) and Pettigrew (1990) for conducting richly contextualised research. Data matrices (Miles and Huberman, 1994) and visual mapping strategies (Langley, 1999) were also applied to engage in data reduction to present the

findings of the case. The case's main limitation is consistent with limitations of single-case research design, as considered by Yin (2009) which includes their lack of generalisation beyond the case. This criticism should, however, be also weighed against the inherent objective of completing an in-depth intrinsic case study, and researching the particularity of that case (Stake, 2010). Further to this, single case study research is an identified and respected methodological approach within organisational disciplines. The following sections of this chapter consider the study's research design and its associated limitations. The chapter then moves to examine the implications of this study on theory, research and practice. The chapter concludes with a consideration of further related research and some overarching concluding remarks.

## **6.2 Research Design**

A qualitative methodology underpinned by a social-constructionism epistemology was employed in this study. Throughout the study there was a continued engagement with research design (Mason, 2002). The fundamental methodological objectives of the study remained consistent throughout and included the development of an intrinsic case study and the adoption of a longitudinal approach. The theoretical framework played an important role in the development of the research design and objectives such as incorporating a historical perspective and considering policy in practice which informed the study's overall design. The research design was also contextualised to the researcher's own personal objectives of completing a doctoral thesis within the university's registration period but also in response to the challenges of a single-researcher conducting a longitudinal analysis. A further challenging aspect for the researcher was in undertaking processual research, as a single researcher within an organisation. The demands of processual research are well-documented, and Pettigrew's (1990: 281) assertion of "...death by data asphyxiation" was not wide off the mark. The use of a

variety of techniques to aid data reduction, analysis and presentation were implemented but the breadth and depth of data remained inherently significant. The researcher had originally decided to transcribe all interviews herself, but the volume and length of interviews, necessitated the recruitment of transcribers to aid with the process. The researcher reviewed each transcription against the recording, and applied the confidentiality and anonymous protocol of interview to the transcriptions. The research design included the full-transcription of interview data. Silverman's (2006) and Kvale's (2007) advice of transcribing based on the level of detail needed, may have proved a useful tool to limit some of the data collected. The use of software to support data collection and analysis facilitated to a great extent the work of the researcher. The researcher implemented a visual mapping strategy as an analytical tool to guide her in the analysis and presentation of findings within the case. The main findings of the case are constructed from accounts of participants based on interview data (Silverman, 2006). Further to this, however, the researcher constructed the context of implementation based on the themes and event waves identified from interview data and through a retrospective analysis of university documentation.

The researcher was mindful in this process of Flick's (2009) assertion of the need to critically assess documents as versions of constructed reality. The researcher, however, did delve into the constructions and the basis for their construction. Alternate analytical strategies such as discourse analysis could also be applied to these documents which may provide a useful basis to complement and contrast with this study. Considering the research design is also important in terms of the researcher holding a complete membership role within the institution (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). The researcher is inherently an insider in the overall context but remains an insider even after the conclusion of this research. The researcher



through the nuances of her professional role within the organisation had access to most participants in her professional capacity. Conducting this study increased access to participants throughout the university and at a variety of levels. Access to documentary data was provided officially by the institution but also by individual participants. This access necessitated the implementation of a further protocol for email communication. One attempt to limit the access previously granted to the researcher did occur during data collection. The researcher's submitted a proposal to the necessary committee and her access was reaffirmed and the study continued with little consequence from this incidence. Even in spite of her holding a complete membership role the issue of time and access were factored into the research design. The strategies employed within the study were in the main successful and demonstrated the capacity of an insider to conduct a processual study. As a participant in the implementation process, however, the researcher felt that she was actively restricting her participation in some settings to minimise any possible manipulation of implementation, whilst recognising that this restriction was a false friend.

The researcher maintained a record which included a reflective element, which allowed the researcher to record her own insights. This data was not included within the case findings. This activity was an attempt to increase objectivity within the study (Scriven, 1972), which the researcher considered in terms of the quality as opposed to distance from the research setting. There are inherently political issues associated with a researcher conducting research in her own workplace. These issues were in the main successfully navigated through the research design. The researcher based her participation in the research within her professional capacity, to militate against any possible potential manipulative behaviour by the study's participants. This decision was also taken by the researcher as it was essential for

her own professional integrity, to maintain her credibility and trustworthiness within the research setting in her complete membership role (Patton, 2002). The researcher was cognisant of the ethical issues associated with conducting insider research and in particular of the balancing of the research objectives with possible positive or negative implications of the research on employees within the organisation (Coghlan and Brannick, 2001). The research design coped with these ethical considerations. The researcher collected data overtly, seeking and gaining the required level of institutional and participant consent from the outset and reconfirming that consent during the research collection phase. Comprehensive strategies to protect the anonymity of participant data were also employed during the collection, analysis and presentation of data.

### **6.3 Limitations**

One of the issues for implementation studies is determining start and end dates (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1984). Determining the implementation start date was not as pronounced as AFI was a planned implementation. Furthermore, the theoretical and methodological framework facilitated a retrospective analysis to uncover the context of implementation. Deciding on an end-date though, was more challenging. Data collection was on-going for three years and in the last round of interviews, participants at the institutional level indicated that the formal implementation of AFI was finished in 2011. This point of time was used by the researcher as an end-date for data collection. An extension of the end-date of the study would have provided the opportunity to consider the implementation over a longer time-period. Furthermore, the researcher with regards to end-date was constrained by her registration period to complete her dissertation. The methodology of this study was also limited to a single researcher conducting a longitudinal study. This limitation was unavoidable in the context of the doctoral

process but the researcher attempted to manage this issue by adopting an appropriate research design.

The objective of the theoretical framework underpinning this study was to consider policy implementation from an ideographic basis. A limitation of this study recognised within the literature, is the absence of practical advice for managers attempting to manage or engage with implementation in the institution from such studies (Buchanan and Boddy, 1992). This limitation though is not seen to have materially affected the objective of the study as independent institutional research. The institution did not stipulate, seek or prescribe that the study produce a set of recommendations or lessons based on its findings. Therefore, although the study is limited by the perspective in this respect, it does, however, satisfy the objective of a comprehensive insight into implementation within the organisation.

The limitation of the lack of generalisation associated with conducting a single case study has been previously referred discussed in this thesis (Yin, 2009). The generalisation of the study's findings, therefore, should not be considered beyond this case. The construction of this case has fulfilled an objective of the study to complete an intrinsic case with the particularity of that case being of interest both to the researcher and to the organisation (Stake, 2010). The use of processual/contextualism, supported a richly contextualised analysis inherent in an ideographic policy study. The particularity of the case, furthermore, does address the empirical gap identified by Keeling (2004) of research into the Bologna Process, and in particular research of the organisational implementation and the context of policy processes. Although, limited by its lack of generalizability the study adds to the body of knowledge and can usefully inform higher education research examining similar or disparate contexts, which is consistent with Tight's (2012) assertion of the usefulness of single case study institutional research.

#### **6.4 Implication of Study – Theory and Research**

Theoretically, this study through its findings and approach to analysis suggests that a form of bounded-rationality is adopted when adopting an ideographic approach to policy analysis. By asserting that policy is made and re-made at various levels of the implementation staircase, inherently suggests that establishing comprehensive policy and policy implementation is not possible for planners (Parsons, 1995). Doing this, however, does not reject that policy and implementation can be planned. Implementation gaps based on contextual and causal simplification, contextual occlusion and the ignoring of meaning and affect are identified within the literature (Trowler, 2008) and also within this study. Nevertheless, by supporting the notion of policy being made and re-made as it travels up and down the implementation staircase inherently suggests that planners could not rationally conceive of all the consequences and alternatives of implementation. Particularly as implementation gaps are linked to the situated-context of implementers. Therefore, an implication of this study is to suggest that by adopting an ideographic approach to policy analysis the study assumes an inherent but yet bounded rationality relating to implementation within the policy process.

Applying an organisational change framework to examine institutional implementation of policy is consistent both with theoretical and empirical studies examining policy implementation in Higher Education (Gornitzka et al., 2005). In that respect this study holds implications for research using organisational change as a theoretical basis for conducting policy implementation studies. This study was framed by the ideographic approach to policy and the selection of an organisational change framework which was consistent with this theoretical basis was essential. Change management models and frameworks are closely aligned with a rational-purposive theoretical approach to policy implementation and were rejected on this basis e.g. (Burke and Litwin, 1992 , Carnall, 1990 , Kotter, 1996 , Senge et al.,

1999). These studies, usually, advance a top-down perspective of policy, where policy and implementation are viewed as coherent, incremental and staged. The theoretical basis of the processual/contextualist perspective does not negate against planned policy implementation nor does it constrict itself to rigidly adhering to a bottom-up approach to implementation. Central to this study's thesis is the argument for ideographic conceptions of policy to be included in policy implementation analysis. This argument is made not to reject out of hand the rational-purposive approach to policy, a position also adopted within the literature (Trowler, 2008). Rather it is argued that by reducing or attempting to reduce the analysis of policy in this way, many valuable insights into the dynamic of policy and policy implementation are lost in translation. A further implication for this study for policy implementation theory is the inherent rejection of one grand theory of implementation, where implementation is "explained more by loops than lines" (Pettigrew, 1990:270). The processual/contextualist perspective expects competing histories which is consistent with an ideographic perspective which endorses that different outcomes of policy will be achieved due to the situated-context of implementers.

This is particularly important when policy is viewed as a more complex concept than just official text produced by *policy makers*. A theoretical implication of this study to the study of policy implementation is, therefore, the processual/contextualism perspective as forming a coherent theoretical basis by which ideographic policy implementation can be conceived of. The framework side steps theoretical and methodological issues associated with conducting policy from either a top-down or bottom-up approach as processual studies have been used in both capacities (Dawson, 2003b , 2005 , Pettigrew, 1985b). The implication that this holds for policy implementation studies is that they do not have to anchor themselves rigidly to this theoretical marker. Furthermore, when the emphasis of such theoretical issues is

reduced, this study findings position the analysis to consider policy in practice at various levels of the implementation staircase, or as described within the literature a move from the macro-theoretical to a more applied conceptualisation of the implementation process (Burke, 2008:141). As a consequence of this, the study develops the notion of policy implementation being conceptualised as a process and supports the notion of policy been made and re-made by implementers within their situated contexts. The study findings emphasised the dynamics of the policy process with a focus on as Demers (2007:103) states “from the language of being to becoming” and what Pettigrew (1985c:287) viewed as studies of “...actors and systems in motion”.

The study, therefore, supports and develops the ideographic conception of policy implementation from implementation to implementing (Weick and Quinn, 1999:382). The basis for such research, therefore, is extended from this perspective for theorists and practitioners to ensure that careful consideration of the “...change-full character of organizational life” is included in the analysis of policy implementation (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002:569). Indeed, Trowler, Saunders and Knight (2003:32) assert that it is more beneficial to contemplate implementing than implementation due to the inherent dynamism that is always involved. A further implication of this study is to add to the empirical research into the implementation of supra-national policy relating to the Bologna process within institutions. Participants account that AFI was partly initiated within the institution based on the Bologna quality and recognition action lines and in response to the creation of the Irish NFQ. An empirical gap was identified by Keeling (2004) of policy processes within institutions and this research adds directly to this body of knowledge by providing an ideographic perspective of how policy is implemented in practice.

### 6.5 Implication of Study – Practice

This study was situated within a university and its findings pointed to a complex and changeable implementation environment. An implication of this study for policy implementers in similar environments situates for them the complexity of engaging in implementation within this context. The dynamic of implementation presented in the findings implies a continued internal tension between administrative and academic focused-contexts, structures and roles. The findings identify academics engaging with project management and implementation across university functions, whilst also constructing a role of administrative participant influence on programme quality assurance, programme structures and module descriptors etc. This study's findings support and develop the notion of changing structures and roles within higher education or what Hussey and Smith (2010) describe as the changing topography in the sector and the hybrid professionals that it is producing. The implication for those engaged with implementation is to be cognisant of this change and to adopt appropriate implementation strategies in response to it. An implication for future practice within the individual institution is to consider a more nuanced approach to roles within the institution and to consider current structures in this respect.

Further to this, implementing AFI highlighted the challenge of implementing an espoused teaching and learning reform within an academic space. The findings demonstrate that in the main the objective of the policy (implementing a learning outcomes paradigm) and the canonical practices of the reform were not encoded or constructed by academic implementers as being related to teaching and learning practices. An important implication of this study for policy implementers in similar environments is the consideration of policy and the associated canonical practices within implementation processes which integrate and link to current constructions of practice. An implication of this study for the institution is that the objectives of policy

should be considered from the basis of the context of practice as constructed within the study. This will illuminate implementation gaps and will aid the institution in any attempt to refine the canonical practices to reflect practice e.g. disciplinary issues and the writing of learning outcomes, the alignment of module outcomes with programme outcomes and the alignment of assessment and learning outcomes. One of the study's findings holds potentially, significant implications for practice with respect to the autonomy of the institution in the accrediting and awarding of degrees of learning. The study findings included a construction that the autonomy of the institution was impinged on as an unanticipated side effect of policy moving down the implementation staircase. This finding suggested that the outcome of a sectoral review panel which benchmarked one of the university's programmes at a lower level put pressure on the university to lower the level of this programme having previously approved it at a higher level of the NFQ. This finding is the first time where the university's approved designation of an award has been questioned by an external body and subsequently been reversed by the institution in response to policy at a higher level on the implementation staircase. This finding also holds implications for practice beyond the institutional-context. This finding suggests that an external authority (i.e. higher education quality authority) developed a precedent (in league with the universities umbrella body and the external accreditation body of the discipline) to review programme designation within the university sector, as a consequence of all awards in higher education institutions being aligned to the Irish NFQ.

## **6.6 Further Research**

This study has focused on the analysis of policy implementation from an ideographic perspective and promotes several areas for further research. Follow up studies implementing the processual/contextualist perspective as a means by which



ideographic conceptions of policy in higher education would be a useful addition to the literature. Such research would expand the basis for a substantial theoretical critique of the efficacy of this perspective in conducting ideographic based policy research. Relating to the objective of AFI policy i.e. the adoption of a learning outcomes paradigm, it is recognised within the Bologna implementation literature that there are major institutional challenges to the introduction of learning outcomes and the wider paradigm including assessment, grading and alignment of outcomes (Adam, 2013). From this basis and with regard to this study's findings in relation to practice, it would be appropriate to conduct a cross-case analysis of implementation. This research could demonstrate the complexity of implementation within institutions (beyond a single institution). Furthermore, it would more than likely re-confirm the empirical research demonstrating that top-down or linear views of higher education policy are inadequate to deal with the complexity of implementation within institutions (Gornitzka et al., 2005).

Further research is also needed into institutional implementation of Bologna policy, as Bologna enters its next implementation phase. Continued research into the context of the organisational implementation context and Bologna, therefore is important not only to close any empirical gaps which may exist, but also as the basis for potential multi-case analysis and synthesis of findings. Veiga's (2010 , 2012) and Sin's (2012) recent work in this area goes somewhat to bridge this gap and provide useful insight in this regard. With respect to this study the researcher proposes to complete follow-up research to consider implementation over a longer period. This proposal for further study is to re-engage with the study to assess the impact of this policy on practice over a longer time-period. A final area of research which would be useful in relation to this study would be to research further the finding relating to the autonomy of the institution within the sector and to assess the longer term impact of this finding.

### 6.7 Concluding Remarks

Greater institutional efficiency demanded by government of higher education in Ireland (HEA, 2012a , 2012b , 2013) is mirrored internationally with the growth of research into policy reforms focused on the evaluation of policy outcomes (Kohoutek, 2013). Such studies have been tagged as implementation studies but should rather be considered as evaluation studies, as their main objective has been to identify if successful implementation occurred based on the objectives of the reform being met. This study adopted an ideographic approach to consider the how of implementing policy and what this meant in practice. Engaging with an implementation study from this basis focused the analysis on the dynamic of policy whilst rejecting that policy remains static and intact as it moves up and down the implementation staircase:

...the at the social structures of industrial concerns are patterned by negotiations and interpretation among participants with diverse interests and resources, so that analyses of variations and changes in such structures must attend to those sustaining and transforming processes.

(Elger, 1975:114)

In conclusion, this study sought to explore how implementation was conducted within one institution. By adopting an ideographic perspective, this study has demonstrated that policy implementation extends beyond official policy texts, and that policy implementation in higher education is inherently complex and dynamic.

## 7 Appendices

### 7.1 Appendix 1: Interview Diary

CASE_STUDY LABEL	DATE	TIME
AFIMGT01	11/02/2010	10AM
AFIMGT02	18/08/2009	11AM
AFIMGT02	29/06/2010	10AM
AFIMGT02	21/06/2011	4PM
AFIMGT03	20/08/2009	10.30AM
AFIMGT03	01/07/2010	3PM
AFIMGT03	30/06/2011	10AM
AFIMGT04	06/08/2009	10AM
AFIMGT04	26/07/2010	10AM
AFIMGT04	11/07/2011	10AM
AFIMGT05	10/08/2009	2PM
AFIMGT06	26/01/2010	11AM
AFIMGT06	28/01/2010	3PM
AFIMGT06	01/07/2010	12PM
AFIMGT06	29/06/2011	4.50PM
AFIMGT07	24/05/2010	2PM
AFIMGT08	19/10/2009	3.30PM
AFIMGT08	02/09/2010	10AM
AFIMGT08	01/07/2011	12PM
AFIMGT09	20/02/2010	2.45PM
AFIMGT09	14/06/2011	10AM
CASE_STUDY LABEL	DATE	TIME
UTL01	30/06/2010	9.30AM
UTL01	27/06/2011	9.30AM
UTL02	16/06/2010	12.30PM
UTL03	23/07/2010	10AM
UTL03	11/07/2011	11.30AM
UTL04	01/06/2010	3.30PM
UTL05	20/05/2010	10AM
UTL06	27/01/2010	4PM
UTL07	12/12/2011	9AM
UTL18	21/06/2012	2PM
CASE_STUDY LABEL	DATE	TIME
ADVISOR01	08/10/2009	2PM
ADVISOR01	10/09/2010	9.30AM
ADVISOR01	25/06/2011	12.30PM
ADVISOR02	25/01/2010	4PM
ADVISOR02	22/09/2010	3.30PM
ADVISOR02	19/07/2011	11AM

CASE_STUDY LABEL	DATE	TIME
ASSOCIATE01	01/07/2009	11.00AM
ASSOCIATE02	02/07/2009	2PM
ASSOCIATE03	06/07/2009	10AM
ASSOCIATE04	03/07/2009	2PM
ASSOCIATE05	02/07/2009	9.15AM
ASSOCIATE06	14/07/2009	10AM
ASSOCIATE07	28/07/2009	2PM
ASSOCIATE08	06/07/2009	1.45PM
ASSOCIATE09	07/07/2009	10AM
ASSOCIATE10	09/07/2009	3.30PM
ASSOCIATE11	07/07/2009	1PM
ASSOCIATE12	08/07/2009	1.159M
ASSOCIATE13	02/07/2009	3.30PM
ASSOCIATE14	06/07/2009	11.30AM
ASSOCIATE15	08/07/2009	12PM
ASSOCIATE16	06/07/2009	2.45PM
ASSOCIATE17	07/07/2009	11AM
ASSOCIATE18	24/07/2009	12PM
ASSOCIATE19	20/07/2009	11AM
ASSOCIATE20	24/07/2009	10AM
ASSOCIATE21	20/07/2009	2PM
ASSOCIATE22	22/07/2009	11AM
ASSOCIATE23	23/07/2009	2PM
ASSOCIATE24	N/A	N/A

CASE_STUDY LABEL	DATE	TIME
FACULTY01	12/07/2010	12.30PM
FACULTY01	27/06/2011	3.00PM
FACULTY02	12/07/2010	4PM
FACULTY02	06/07/2011	2.30PM
FACULTY03	14/07/2010	1.15PM
FACULTY03	20/06/2011	4PM

CASE_STUDY LABEL	DATE	TIME
FACUTLY_TL01	16/07/2010	10AM
FACUTLY_TL01	05/07/2011	2.15PM
FACUTLY_TL02	21/07/2010	10.30AM
FACUTLY_TL03	10/08/2010	1PM
FACUTLY_TL03	30/06/2011	1PM
FACUTLY_TL04	31/08/2010	1PM
FACUTLY_TL05	01/09/2010	2.30PM
FACUTLY_TL05	30/06/2011	3.45PM
FACUTLY_TL06	04/07/2011	12.30PM
FACUTLY_TL07	05/07/2011	10AM

CASE_STUDY LABEL	DATE	TIME
PTL01	14/07/2010	2.45PM
PTL02	26/07/2010	12PM
PTL02	21/07/2011	2PM
PTL03	03/08/2010	3.30PM
PTL04	06/08/2010	4PM
PTL05	23/07/2010	12.30PM
PTL05	06/07/2011	11.30AM
PTL06	12/08/2010	11AM
PTL06	06/07/2011	10AM
PTL07	12/08/2010	12PM
PTL08	05/07/2011	3.15PM
PTL09	05/07/2011	12PM
PTL10	20/06/2011	3PM
CASE_STUDY LABEL	DATE	TIME
SECTOR01	13/05/2010	10AM

## 7.2 Appendix 2: Sampling Criteria for Interviews

Grouping		Sampling Criteria
<b>AFI Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Invite all within group to interview</li> <li>– Re-interview all participants and invite successors to interview</li> </ul>	– N/A
<b>AFI Associate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Invite all within group to interview</li> </ul>	– N/A
<b>AFI Advisory</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Invite all within sampled group to interview</li> <li>– Re-interview all participants</li> </ul>	– University academic support unit(s) with support function for academic, modular or programme enhancement and/or with administrative support for academic administration except financial
<b>University Teaching and Learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Invite all within sampled group to interview</li> <li>– Re-interview all participants and invite successors to interview</li> </ul>	– University-level personnel with current or former responsibility for teaching and learning within the university
<b>Faculty Administration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Invite all within group to interview</li> <li>– Re-interview all participants</li> </ul>	– N/A
<b>Faculty Teaching and Learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Invite all within sampled group to interview</li> <li>– Re-interview all participants and invite successors to interview</li> </ul>	– Academics and administrative within the selected faculty and its schools with specific responsibility for teaching and learning
<b>Programme teaching and learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Invite all within sampled group to interview</li> <li>– Re-interview all participants</li> </ul>	– Academics from Schools with continued programme level responsibility for teaching and learning, also include academics who participated within AFI advisory group

### 7.3 Appendix 3: Interview Consent Form

#### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN INTERVIEW

**Purpose of Research:** The aim of this work is to examine the adoption and implementation of the Academic Framework for Innovation in Dublin City University as a process, this forms part of my Doctoral research.

**Results:** Results will be shared in a case report. Anonymity and confidentiality of all participants will be maintained. As a participant in my research, an electronic copy of the case study will be available to you if you request one.

The contents of all interviews will be transcribed and analysed during the course of the research. The findings will be included in a case study and as part of a submitted thesis, which will undergo examination by the University of Durham. Dublin City University will review the case study to correct factual inaccuracies and/or treatment or representation of institutional sensitivities. The written work may include quotations from some of the interviews. Interviews will be referenced using tags AFI (number) e.g. AFIMGT 12. I would be grateful if you could confirm, by signing this form, that you consent to the use of the recorded interview or extracts from it in this way.

**Right of Exclusion or Withdrawal:** If you feel uncomfortable with the content of the discussion during the interview you are free to terminate participation. You will not be asked to answer any questions unwillingly.

I agree that the interview may be electronically recorded. Any questions that I asked about the purpose and nature of the interview and assignment have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree that my interview can be used for the purposes of the doctoral thesis and that my identity will be not be disclosed.

Name of interviewee \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of interviewee \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please contact Mairéad Nic Giolla Mhichíl (mairead.nicgiollamhichil@dcu.ie) with any questions or concerns.

## 7.4 Appendix 4: Sample Interview Guide

Time:	Date:	Ref:	Site:	Seq:
<b>Introduction</b> – The following interview is to elicit your view on the adoption, implementation and effect of AFI in DCU. If at any time you do not wish to answer a question, please do so.				
<b>Opening Question: How long are you working in Dublin City University?</b>				
<b>What is your grade?</b>				
<b>Closing Question: Are there any other comments you would like to make in relation to AFI?</b>				
<b>Themes &amp; Questions</b>				
<b>Adoption - Internal Context</b>				
1. Why did AFI come about in DCU? 2. What role did you play in the beginning?				
<b>Adoption - External Context</b>				
1. Was there a catalyst from the external environment to engage with an initiative such as AFI in DCU?				
<b>Internal Context - Process</b>				
1. What do you think of the implementation process? 2. What were the strengths of the process thus far? 3. Which features of the AFI implementation would you suggest improvements? 4. What were the principle issues for the process? 5. Could these issues have been pre-empted? 6. What were the lessons learned during the process? 7. Was it difficult to make decisions in the process, academic issues or other issues? 8. Was consensus an issue? 9. Communication structures within the process? 10. Do you think that AFI has been effectively communicated with academic staff in the university? 11. Consensus through the process? 12. Did you view AFI as an opportunity for quality review? 13. Does the process support the benefits of the initiative for academic/students and DCU in general? 14. Has DCU engaged in enough discussion regarding the fuller development of AFI throughout the university? 15. Do you think students should play a role in the process 16. Do you think AFI has acted as a catalyst for academic change in DCU? 17. What effect did other units within DCU have on the initiative 18. If you were to describe the implementation process would you view it as an organic one .i.e. that as we learned and fed back into the process we could move ahead as opposed to attempting to plan it out at the start? 19. What do you consider are the resource issues for the implementation of AFI? 20. What is your view of the future of the implementation process based on your past experience with it				
<b>External Context – Process</b>				
1. What external factors influenced the implementation plan and/ or aims of AFI? 2. Did these factors change or delay it?				
<b>Implementation – Internal Context - Personnel</b>				
1. How would you describe the AFI initiative as you currently view it? 2. Does this view differ from your original conception of AFI? 3. What do you think of the role of the AFI Fellow / Associate Deans for Teaching and Learning /AFI Team Leader in the implementation process? 4. How would you evaluate the role of the fellows/ADTLs etc.? 5. Do you think that it was important for an academic to lead this role 6. Has your role and participation in AFI lived up to your expectations? 7. Has AFI been sold to the wider academic community? 8. And who should sell it? 9. Has there been adequate debate around the wider educational issues associated with AFI				
<b>Internal Context – Structures</b>				
1. Why did DCU need to engage in AFI? 2. Has AFI brought changes to structures, processes or rules within DCU? 3. Do you conceive that it will influence other areas within the university? 4. Will AFI change anything in the University? 5. Will AFI change academic behaviour?				
<b>Internal Context personnel</b>				
1. How would you sum up your experience with AFI? 2. Are you aware of the perception of AFI in the wider higher education community? 3. Has DCU's engagement in AFI been of benefit to it in the wider higher education community? 4. Could DCU have used AFI as part of a branding strategy to promote the university? 5. What external benefit is AFI to DCU? 6. Going forward what advice would you give to DCU in relation to AFI				



## 7.5 Appendix 5: Interview Summary Sheet

Interview Summary Sheet – Adoption and Implementation of AFI in DCU Adapted from (Miles and Huberman, 1994)	
Reference	Interviewee
Interview Date	Date Summarised
1. Main Issues or Themes from Interview	
2. Summarise information on target research questions	
3. Other salient, interesting, illuminating issues from the interview?	
4. New (or remaining question to be asked in the next interview)	
5. Additional Notes & Comments	

## 7.6 Appendix 6: Transcriber Confidentiality Form

### CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT TRANSCRIPTION SERVICES

I, \_\_\_\_\_transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audio files, documentation received from Mairéad Nic Giolla Mhichíl and transcriptions completed relating to her doctoral study:

I furthermore agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of the audio-files of interviews; or in any associated documents.
2. To not make copies of any audio files or associated computerized files of the transcribed interview texts, unless specifically asked to do so by Mairéad Nic Giolla Mhichíl. To disclose and send computerized files and transcriptions to Mairéad Nic Giolla Mhichíl only.
3. To store all of the audio files and associated texts and materials in a safe; secure location as long as they are in my possession. To inform Mairéad Nic Giolla Mhichíl immediately, if any files or associated texts are lost or stolen.
4. To return all associated text-files i.e. transcriptions and related documents to Mairéad Nic Giolla Mhichíl in a complete and timely manner agreed with Mairéad Nic Giolla Mhichíl.
5. To delete all audio files and text files including backups from my computer hard-drive, back-up devices, digital storages devices and email files.

I am aware that I can be held legally liable for any breach of this confidentiality agreement and for any harm incurred by individuals, if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audio files and associated transcriptions to which I will have access:

Transcriber's Name (Printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Transcriber's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## 7.7 Appendix 7: Document Consent Form

### CONSENT TO REVIEW EMAIL COMMUNICATION & LIMITED DISCLOSURE AGREEMENT

**Purpose of Research:** The aim of this work is to examine the process of adoption and of implementation of the Academic Framework for Innovation in Dublin City University as a process, this forms part of my Doctoral research.

**Results:** Results will be shared in a case report. Anonymity and confidentiality of all participants will be maintained. As a participant in my research, an electronic copy of the case study will be available to you if you request one.

The contents of all email communications will be reviewed and analysed as part of this study. Findings may be included in a case study and as part of a submitted thesis, which will undergo examination by the University of Durham. Dublin City University will review the case study to correct factual inaccuracies and/or treatment or representation of institutional sensitivities. Quotations from email communications received will be included only with written and prior consent of the original email author (or authors). Referencing will be implemented using a tagged schema: AFI (number) e.g. AFI 12 or groupings of participants e.g. AFI fellow group, senior management, AFI executive, key internal informant.

**Right of Exclusion or Withdrawal:** If you feel uncomfortable with the use or review of email communications please do not hesitate to contact the researcher immediately. I would be grateful if you could confirm, by signing this form that you consent to the review, analysis and use of email communications in this way – subject to the aforementioned disclosure and referencing conditions.

I agree that email communication can be reviewed and analysed by the researcher. Any questions that I asked about the purpose and nature of the research have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree that the review of email communication can be used for the purposes of the doctoral thesis – subject to the aforementioned disclosure and referencing conditions. My identity will not be disclosed.

Name of participant \_\_\_\_\_ Signature of participant \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

I confirm that access to email communication received from the above participant will be reviewed and analysed by the researcher for the purposes of this research study. I agree to the conditions of the aforementioned disclosure and referencing conditions.

Name of researcher \_\_\_\_\_ Signature of researcher \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

## 7.8 Appendix 8: Adapted AFI Proposal

### Academic Framework for Innovation (AFI) Proposals to Academic Council (25 June 2007)

#### Introduction

Following discussion at Executive, Academic Council and the Academic Strategy Committee, the recommendations from the Working Group on Modularisation were referred for detailed consideration to the Associate Deans for T&L, the Director of the Registry, the Head of the LIU and the Education Officer of the SU. A summary report, incorporating key elements contained in a detailed paper prepared by the Associate Deans, was presented to Executive on 28 November 2006. A more detailed paper was then discussed by faculties, prior to further discussion by Academic Strategy Committee and Academic Council on 14 February 2007. An Academic Framework for Innovation was then proposed, which would assist in the delivery of the Learning Innovation element of the Strategic Plan by:

- placing DCU in the forefront of educational thinking
- building upon existing strengths
- enabling interdisciplinarity
- rectifying current anomalies
- fostering flexible approaches to programme development
- widening student choice - both in terms of curriculum and mode of study
- supporting retention

Following an extensive consultation with all staff, the initial document was restructured and reworded. While the core ideas presented at Academic Council on 14<sup>th</sup> February remain, they have been clarified. Colleagues' comments, questions and concerns are addressed as much as possible in the present document, which now includes additional details on the rationale and implications of each core principle (now called *precepts*). We have also included a FAQ section. The proposals outlined in this document set out the blue print for a new academic framework, which will direct the review of existing programmes and awards and the design of new ones as well as their overall management. They do *not* constitute a step-by-step set of procedures, nor do they intend to impose rigid constraints on the day-to-day management of programmes. Rather, the adoption of these proposals will guarantee the University stakeholders that, irrespective of the exact form of the final framework, the University will be able to maintain and to ensure the sustainable development of its portfolio of diverse, flexible and innovative programmes. These proposals are now put to Academic Council for consideration and adoption.

## **Proposals for the design and implementation of a new Academic Framework for Innovation (AFI)**

### **Proposal 1: Guiding principles**

The following principles will guide any new academic framework adopted and implemented by the university:

**1.1** The University is committed to meeting Bologna requirements, to complying with EU and national standards and to enhancing the quality of students' learning experience and outcomes;

**1.2** The University is committed to guaranteeing fair and equitable assessment for all students;

**1.3** The University is committed to taking cognisance of changes in study and work patterns, and to accommodating non-traditional students.

### **Proposal 2: Supporting the framework**

Implementation of proposals 3 & 4 is conditional on the availability of appropriate support and resources.

### **Proposal 3: AFI precepts**

The DCU Academic Framework for Innovation will be characterised by the following precepts:

**3.1** The DCU portfolio of programme and awards will be compliant with the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

**3.2** Flexible learning pathways and programme access will be supported. In particular, annual progression will no longer be a universal requirement.

**3.3** Registration for a module will last for one academic year only. Any resit opportunities must take place within this registration period.

**3.4** New operations and procedures surrounding the allocation of marks and degree classification will be established:

(i) *Module Boards* will agree marks;

(ii) *Award Boards* will validate students' results, monitor and record their progress, and agree award grades.

(See detailed information and analysis in Section 3.)

### **Proposal 4: Implementation schedule**

The Academic Framework for Innovation will be designed and implemented according to the following schedule. The timing of the implementation phase is contingent on the adoption by the HEA of a module-based funding model to replace the programme based funding model currently used. Here we assume a start date of the 2010-2011 academic year for full implementation.

	Sep-2007	Feb-2008	Aug-2008	Sep-2008	Feb-2009	Aug-2009	Sep-2009	Feb-2010	Aug-2010	Sep-2010	Feb-2011	Aug-2011
<b>Implementation of NFQ for Bologna compliance</b>												
Information and training sessions on NFQ and Learning Outcomes												
Preparation of new Marks and Standards, validation and accreditation templates, etc.												
Re-design of awards, modules and programmes in line with NFQ Learning Outcomes model												
<b>Development of new Academic Framework and piloting</b>												
Setting up of new structures and procedures for Module and Award Boards												
Design, development and testing of integrated Registration/Timetabling/ITS System,												
Gaming/simulation of implementation of AFI												
AFI piloting in Faculties (self-selected programmes/awards)												
Review of operation and subsequent revision of procedures, infrastructure, etc.												
<b>Implementation Phase</b>												
All new programmes under AFI												
Full implementation of new structures in integrated ITS ( <i>old and new programmes</i> )												
Full implementation of AFI												

### Proposal 3: Background and explanatory notes

Proposals	Rationale/underlying principles	Suggested implementation process	Anticipated additional benefits and outcomes	Requirements (some requiring substantial funding)
<b>3.1 The DCU portfolio of programme and awards will be compliant with the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).</b>	To meet Bologna requirements; To facilitate compliance with national/EU standards and quality enhancement of students' learning experience and outcomes.	<i>Programme Review and (re-)validation</i> incl. adoption of a Learning Outcomes (LO) model for awards, modules and assessment; In-depth study of assessment for LO-based curriculum and application to existing and new programme and modules; Development and integration of a Quality Enhancement and Assurance <b>Action: USC, ASC, OVPLI, LIU, Faculties, Programme Boards, Quality Promotion Unit</b>	Alignment with formal European and national quality assurance procedures; Improved student mobility.	Training and support programme for staff; Staff release (academic and admin) in faculties, Registry, CSD & Ed. Services, Finance, etc.) Appropriate templates for module/programme reviews; New module descriptors; New validation and accreditation templates, documentation and procedures; <b>Action: Executive, HR, USC, ASC, Finance Office, Budget Committee</b>

Proposals	Rationale/underlying principles	Suggested implementation process	Anticipated additional benefits and outcomes	Requirements (some requiring substantial funding)
<b>3.2 Flexible learning pathways and programme access will be supported. In particular, annual progression will no longer be a universal requirement.</b>	To adapt to changes in student lifestyle and to reality of study/work patterns; To accommodate non-traditional students; To support retention.	Provision of <i>teaching resource requirements</i> (rooms and facilities/equipment, working day/week, academic calendar, learning technologies, etc.); Provision of services outside normal hours (e.g. library, registry opening hours, etc.) Clear definition of <i>pre-requisites and co-requisites</i> for modules contributing to DCU awards, inc. 'shelf-life' of accumulated credits; Specification of award requirements; Deployment of a <i>robust information management infrastructure</i> , incl. integrated timetabling, registration and student records; <i>Pilot</i> in Faculties. <b>Action: Registry, CSD, Estates, Faculties</b>	Match the challenge to student's circumstances; Student-centred framework (e.g. facilitating either part-time or accelerated study); Standards maintained/enhanced (e.g. students may elect to focus on selected areas to ensure in-depth learning).	Clarify HEA funding model in relation to part-time students; Check local authorities' regulation re: tuition and maintenance grants (and lobby if necessary); Clarity on potential HR issues;  <b>Action: Senior Management, OVPLI, HR, Finance Office</b>



Proposals	Rationale/underlying principles	Suggested implementation process	Anticipated additional benefits and outcomes	Requirements (some requiring substantial funding)
<b>3.3 Registration for a module will last for one academic year only. Any resit opportunities must take place within this registration period.</b>	<p>To guarantee fair and equitable assessment for all students;</p> <p>To provide stimulus to improve standards of achievement;</p> <p>To facilitate the change/ development of modules and/or assessment methods;</p> <p>To better manage modules with large component of CA or large component of teamwork;</p> <p>To guarantee achievement of Learning Outcomes.</p>	<p>Development of a suitable <i>registration process and systems</i></p> <p><b>Action: Registry, CSD, Faculties</b></p>	<p>Standards enhanced (e.g. guaranteed achievement of specified learning outcomes);</p> <p>Allows more choice to students;</p> <p>Simplified administration procedures and better/easier/ more reliable record keeping – everybody treated the same way.</p> <p>No complication of different types of modules and different types of registration (such as attendance or exam only);</p> <p>Facilitates change of lecturer for module.</p>	<p>Clarity and transparency regarding fees for modules/exams.</p> <p><b>Action: Executive/Finance</b></p>

Proposals	Rationale/underlying principles	Suggested implementation process	Anticipated additional benefits and outcomes	Requirements (some requiring substantial funding)
<p><b>3.4 New operations and procedures surrounding the allocation of marks and degree classification will be established:</b></p> <p><b>(i) <i>Module Boards</i> will agree <u>marks</u>;</b></p> <p><b>(ii) <i>Award Boards</i> will validate students' results, monitor and record their progress, and agree <u>award grades</u>.</b></p>	<p>To guarantee fair and equitable assessment for all students; (full or part time, etc);</p> <p>To eliminate differential decision-making for same modules on different programmes;</p> <p>To accommodate individualised pathways;</p> <p>To properly/fully implement Learning Outcomes model.</p>	<p>Replace current PBERCs and PABs by Module Boards (MBs) and Awards Boards (ABs);</p> <p>Define <i>role and membership</i> of MBs and ABs, including role and membership of <i>external examiners</i>;</p> <p>Academic Council to <i>approve membership</i> of MBs and ABs;</p> <p>Redefine role and membership of <i>programme boards</i> (or school teaching committees, course teams, etc.);</p> <p>Establish reporting mechanisms between Programme Boards and MBs/Abs (e.g. as relevant statistical information to be passed on to Award Board).</p> <p><b><u>Action:</u> Registrar, Academic Council, USC, Faculties, Schools</b></p>	<p>Module marks agreed on the basis of achievement and separate from implications for individual student's award;</p> <p>Module marks can only be changed at the relevant Module Board, which includes the external examiner(s);</p> <p>Award Board to maintain "gold standard" system of H1, H2.1, etc...;</p> <p>Students full record provided to new AB;</p> <p>Full individual student's record to be available in addition to broadsheet (longsheet);</p>	<p>New <i>Marks and Standards</i> for LO model</p> <p><b><u>Action:</u> Registry, USC.</b></p>

## **Appendix - Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Could you be more specific about the kind of support that is envisaged?**

There is no doubt that reforming our academic framework along the lines proposed here will be a costly, complex, and time consuming endeavour. However, this should be seen as an investment, which will benefit the whole university in the medium and longer term. Adequate staff support and training in reviewing programmes and modules in the light of the NFQ is absolutely essential if our portfolio of programmes is to be enhanced. Furthermore, we believe that a number of colleagues from each faculty, both academic and non-academic, should be released from some of their normal duties in order to champion and co-ordinate the review of programmes and modules, and to design and test new programme management structures and administrative procedures in collaboration with Registry, CSD and any other relevant unit. Robust, reliable and user-friendly information and data management systems are equally essential if the implementation of the AFI is to be successful. A fully integrated registration/timetabling/ITS system is required and will have to be properly tested before full implementation occurs. Gaming or simulating the implementation of the AFI will indeed be a fundamental stepping stone in our move towards the new framework. The results of such a simulation should enable us to identify areas that may require revisions as well as the limitations imposed by our staffing and physical resources, such as the number and type of classrooms that will be required, teaching and learning facilities and equipment, etc.

### **There is no mention of modularisation in the proposals...**

Modularisation is about giving students significant control over their educational experience. By definition, this control is exercised through the choice of modules. On the other hand, learning in DCU has been characterised over the last 25 years by denominated programmes with whatever choice there is usually being strongly circumscribed. The aim of the Academic Framework for Innovation is not to impose full modularisation on all DCU Awards. Rather it is to enable the definition of awards that are achieved through modularised pathways, as well as accommodating awards where the set of modules required is more tightly defined (such as in the case of awards accredited by national professional bodies).

### **What are NQAI and NFQ?**

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) was set up by legislation to introduce a qualifications framework for all qualifications at all levels in Ireland, including awards made by professional bodies. This framework (the National Qualifications Framework – NFQ) is binding on the FETAC and HETAC sectors. It is not strictly speaking binding on the Universities, but the IUA have agreed to align their major and minor awards with it. The NFQ has now also been aligned with the two cycles of the Bologna process. Internationally, the Irish NFQ is seen as a fundamental element in the development of an overarching European Qualifications Framework, the purpose of which is to provide a tool for the mobility, transfer and progression of students and graduates across Europe. The NFQ is thus a Bologna compliant, Irish system of ten levels. It is designed to provide appropriate awards for the students' level of learning, wherever obtained. It puts the focus on learning outcomes, at both programme and module level. The NFQ emphasises breadth and depth of knowledge as well as professional skills and competencies. Accordingly, learning outcomes and their associated assessment methods drive learning activities and student engagement. The NFQ also supports the national objective of moving towards a lifelong learning society.

The NFQ framework has been adopted by the second level system, and many professional bodies in Ireland. As a result, the language of the NFQ has become the

main language of the majority of the third level sector stakeholders including FETAC and HETAC.

### **What is a module in the context of the NFQ? How does it differ from current DCU modules?**

Under the proposed AFI, modules need to be characterised by their academic level, the amount of student activity involved as indicated by the number of ECTS credits, when and how they are delivered, and possibly in certain cases by a “shelf-life” or expiry date. We focus here just on the academic level aspect. DCU currently has five different module levels, corresponding roughly to academic years. In the NFQ system, the term “level” is applied to awards and there are level descriptors associated with each level of award. Of the post-leaving certificate awards, DCU is primarily concerned with NFQ Level 8 (Honours Bachelor), NFQ Level 9 (Masters) and NFQ Level 10 (Doctorate). There is to an extent an academic progression in the post leaving cert NFQ levels 6-10, but it is by no means the only distinguishing characteristic – primarily these award levels are about fitness for purpose. It does not seem to be simple or useful to equate the progress of a DCU student from entry into the University towards an Honours Bachelor award with the NFQ level 6, 7 and 8 progression. Consequently, we could use here the term *stage* to refer to this progress from ab initio entry towards a Level 8 or Level 9 award. The most natural and most useful categorisation of this progress seems to be in terms of three stages to an Honours Bachelor plus one further stage for the taught Masters level. For example, the following categorisation could be adopted:

- *Introductory Stage* (DCU existing Level 1, probably about 60 credits maximum for any award);
- *Intermediate Stage* (DCU existing Levels 2 and 3 on a four year degree; Level 2 on a three year degree, probably 60 -120 credits);
- *Advanced, or Honours Bachelor Stage* (DCU existing level 4 on a four year degree; Level 3 on a three year degree, probably about 60 credits);
- *Expert, or Graduate/Masters/Doctorate Stage* (DCU existing level 5).

Stage descriptors analogous to the NFQ level descriptors will need to be defined in order to act as a meta-framework for the writing of module Learning Outcomes, so that these are consistent across the University. Because Learning Outcomes are intimately connected with the assessment, another way of putting this would be to decide that, as Dr D.G.A. Scurry puts it in his report to the DCU Working Group on Modularisation in 2004, “University-wide assessment criteria will need to be developed to ensure that modules taught at the same [stage] are assessed to similar standards.”

### **Where are the “Programmes”? And the Programme Boards?**

In DCU terminology, the term “programme” refers to a defined set of modules and stages that students are required to complete successfully in order to be awarded a denominated degree. Under the AFI, programmes still exist but they are likely to be more flexible and individualised than is currently the case. A programme may thus refer to the learning pathways or trajectory (i.e. the suite of modules, with their pre- and co-requisites) taken by an individual student registered for an award. The range of learning pathways that students can choose will be specified by the Award requirements as defined by validation and accreditation.

Programme Boards/School & Faculty Teaching Committees will still exist and may be responsible for more than one award. However, their terms of reference and membership may need to be reviewed and harmonised within and between Faculties. In any case, Programme Chairs and/or Course Directors will continue to play a key role in the development, management, operations and monitoring/evaluation of programmes and awards. For example, Programme Boards functions are likely to include Quality Assurance procedures. Robust communication channels and reporting mechanisms between Programme Boards, Module Boards and Award Boards will also need to be put in place.

**What will be the composition of Module Examination Boards (MB) and Award Boards (AB)?**

At this stage, it is envisaged that Module Boards will have responsibility for more than one module. Given the differences between and within Faculties, Schools and/or disciplines will determine the required number of Module Boards for which they are responsible. The specific modules falling under the remit of a Module Board may be determined according to established discipline boundaries (e.g. inorganic chemistry, organic chemistry, French language, accounting, etc.) or according to any coherent set of criteria deemed as most appropriate. Each Module Board must have at least one external examiner (in this case, the MB may be responsible for all modules sharing the same external examiner), but may have more. All internal examiners/assessors would normally be members of the relevant Module Board(s). By contrast, only selected representatives from the MBs involved in an award/programme would be members of the corresponding Award Board. The number of representatives would reflect the number of credits from the MB that contribute to the award. Award External Examiners (as distinct from Module Board External Examiners) and Chairs of Programme Boards/Course directors will be key members of the Award Board, which may be chaired by the Dean of the Faculty or his/her nominee. The membership of Module Boards and Award Boards will be approved by Academic Council/University Standard Committee.

**What kind of 'information infrastructure' will be put in place?**

An Information Infrastructure that combines information on registration, current student module completion status, module learning outcomes, award requirements and timetabled contact events, will need to be introduced. The infrastructure should allow a student and/or an academic mentor to explore what options are available for proceeding, given the student's current status. Fixed and centralised timetables with coherent or coordinated treatment of different categories of student contact such as lectures, seminars, tutorials, labs, etc., are a feature of modularised systems generally. These would need to be introduced in DCU.

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